



Bound
in
Shallows

Eva Wilder
Brothman

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“SHE LOOKED BACK”

BOUND IN SHALLOWS

A Novel

BY

EVA WILDER BRODHEAD

AUTHOR OF

"DIANA'S LIVERY" "AN EARTHLY PARAGON"
"MINISTERS OF GRACE" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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TO
HENRY C. BROSHEAD

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BOUND IN SHALLOWS

I

HE knew that they were talking of him—talking with heat and force and an accent of argument. He could not, indeed, hear what they were saying, for a lusty wind of late May whirred in the great beeches under which he sat, somewhat off from the pale brown bulk of the big, ruinous hotel, and the murmur of the leaves mixed confusedly with the cries of a blue-jay, flashing skyey gleams from branch to branch. Children, too, were shouting; a dog barked shrilly in the yard of some little dwelling below the cliff, while from the unseen railway tracks at the brow of the hill, where workmen were putting in new ties, came a dull sound of hammering, which reduced to mere intonations the voices of the two elderly men on the hotel porch.

These intonations, however, conveyed a full and perfect assurance of diverging opinions ; and if Dillon had required further evidence that his uncle and the president of the mill were not at one concerning him, he might have found it in the very attitude of the talkers and in the drift of their occasional gestures. But Dillon did not need any such corroboration ; he knew very well what it all meant. His mind was quite free from curiosity, and he was sensible of feeling nothing very clearly except a sickish sense of pity for his uncle.

“ What a position for the poor old fellow ! ” muttered Dillon. “ Would to God I had acted differently ! But how could I, being what I am ? ” He drew his hand, a slim, nervous hand, across his temples with the swift stroke of a man who defies a rising emotion. His chin, which had a hint of race in the slight bulge just under the lip, shook a little, and then settled to a sullen kind of calm. He jerked his straw hat over his dimming eyes, which were deeply blue, with dilating pupils and a large movement in their wasted orbits. Below them were bluish shadows and the radiation of lines that looked strangely sharp in so youthful a face. The paleness and softness of Dillon’s cheek, under its wisping thread of yellowish mustache, bore out this intimation of worn

tissues and depleted nerves ; and there was also in the line of the young man's shoulders a certain laxity which seemed to hint of some inert quality of temperament. Even as he straightened himself and struck a sudden hand upon his knee this suggestion did not wholly disappear.

“Perhaps I may make it up to him yet !” he thought, listlessly. “Who knows ? ‘Best men,’ they say, ‘are moulded out of faults.’ If only that resolute-looking old official yonder would listen to reason. Who knows ?” He turned to glance a questioning eye towards the high piazza of the hotel.

His uncle appeared to be laying off in one lean shred of a hand some weighty point for Dunbar’s consideration. From his bronzed old cheeks his white side-beard jutted with an eager alertness, and the pose of his small, wiry frame indicated pleading and suspense. Opposite him, in a kind of patient, passive stolidity, Dunbar sat listening, polite but unimpressed. Over his collar the thick ridges of his neck bulged hard and decisive, and the set of his large graying head seemed to presage an unalterable conviction.

“Evidently he refuses to be influenced,” Dillon concluded. “He’s going to disown the whole thing. Well, I’m not sur-

prised. Nor do I blame him much." He sighed and his face flagged as he looked across the valley and sighted the distant knobs, and began to realize how he had built upon the chance of losing himself and forgetting the fever and fret of life in this quiet spot niched so peacefully in the Cumberland foot-hills. He could catch the swarthy shine of the rivers far below; for the town lay snugly in the arms of the Cumberland and its South Fork; while all about the cleft lowlands rose a ring of hills, wooded to the crest, and lapsing through every gradation of spring greenness to the milky lilac of the shadowy rises rippling across the remoter sky of Wayne County.

Up hill and down it lay, as he could see—this Kentucky town, through which the course of the great railway curved, bridging the wide river and swagging along the east cliff above the sharp descent of the hill road. Down in the swale of the waterways several spreading mill roofs, flanked with countless piles of timber, with stave-buckers, with a number of stores, a Masonic building, a church spire, and a great many small houses, flashed off a bright magenta through the full leafage of late spring. Like threads of yellow in a green fabric, two or three flat, curbless roads stitched the weedy bottoms. One of them, sheering abruptly,

crossed the railway at the *jig-sawed* station near the knoll on which the hotel reared its faded pinnacles and scaling towers and empty flag-staff. Beyond the net-work of tracks and switches this stony, deeply rutted cart-way, twisting past the station platform, made a final rise to the level of the bluff and wandered off in the swarded, shaded skirts of the smooth headlands. These upper places of the village, with their half-dozen dwellings of modern fashions, held the same outlook, wild and changing and always full of beauty, which spread itself before the hotel knoll. And sitting in the shadow of the beeches, gazing out upon the differences of the scene, Dillon felt a sense of resentment coloring his pleasure in the broken splendors of these hills and streams. With them about him it appeared as if he might have braced himself for a last trial of life, and the brightness of their aspect was naturally enhanced by the sullen negation of Dunbar's manner.

"It all depends on what he has heard of me," mused Dillon. "Or is at present hearing!" he added, remarking his uncle's animated flow of talk. "God knows just how far the poor old man will feel compelled to push his disclosures!" He bit his lip; and as he did so its suggestion of Irish blood came

into greater prominence. In a chopping of the wind a single word drifted to his ears. It was on his uncle's lips; but Dunbar, rousing a little, took it up, repeating it in a kind of disliking fashion not in the least encouraging to Dillon's hopes.

“Mistakes!” said the president of the mill. “If it were only a question of mistakes, Mr. Burkely! But I’m afraid the word isn’t descriptive. Eh?—I don’t want to be too hard on young blood! I haven’t always been old myself! Hang it, no!” He laughed, rubbing his knee appreciatively, as one who does not undervalue the instructive quality of youthful errors. “But in business,” he went on, stiffening again—“in business a man’s got to—to draw the line somewhere. He’s got to. Now I don’t like to say anything that may displease you, Burkely, but we both know that your nephew has kept up a pretty lively pace. You see, I’m in Cincinnati myself off and on, and I hear things. I’ve heard of him, particularly, because he was with the Jonas Lumber Company, and I have dealings with the Jonases myself. Of course I’ve nothing to say concerning young Dillon’s character or conduct, except that when you ask me to make a place for him in the mill I feel as if I had no right, even when I think of my personal friendship for

you, to forget that he has led a wild sort of life. It's true that you are a large stockholder—”

“I haven't asked you to give him a position on that base, Mr. Dunbar.”

“You have a perfect right to ask it on that base—just as I have the right, on the same base, to hesitate. You see, I'm afraid he'll only spoil our discipline. How can any one hope that he'll stick to business? He had an enviable position with the Jonases. Only the most powerful influence could have secured such an opening for an inexperienced man. I don't ask what he did to lose that opening; but I suppose he has lost it, since he is willing to take a mere clerkship in the mill. I gather that his dissipations forced the Jonases to dispense with his services. Probably, then, he would be of very little use to us.”

“He is greatly changed—greatly changed.”

“Well, I hope so. But I've a kind of notion that men never change very greatly.”

“Never change!—that would be a subversion of all morality!—good heavens! See here, Dunbar, you're too critical. I haven't denied that my boy has had his fling, have I? Nor have I said he's that paragon of broomsticks, a model young man. He isn't. He has faults. I wouldn't give much for a man of twenty-seven

that hadn't. But he has virtues, too—virtues, sir ! He's clever. He's generous. He's kind. He hasn't a grain of conceit. He's gentle and amiable, always ; and it has been justly said that these qualities precede all morality. Of course he's been thoughtless, reckless. Like Marc Antony in the play—Shakespeare, you remember—he's been given to sports, to wildness, and much company. All reclaimable faults. Quite reclaimable !”

“M-m ; well, perhaps.”

“And then I'm considerably to blame, myself. He came into my charge as a child—my sister's boy. She'd made a bad marriage, and when she died she left him to me. Only five years old, poor little beggar ! I didn't know how to rear him. We've lived around at hotels. He's never had a home or the influences that a boy ought to have. I've spoilt him—I admit it. He's always done as he pleased. I was too fond of him to cross him. I don't suppose you can understand how I feel. But if you had a boy of your own, however wayward, you'd be able to.”

Dunbar growled out a word of doubt. Something in the old man's face, so piteous in its eagerness, touched him, and he frowned down his awakening compassion.

“I admit,” quavered Mr. Burkely, “that he

—he threw away his opportunities with the Jonases. It was six months ago. Since then he's been badly off, and though we've travelled he hasn't got back his tone. He can't rid himself of a deadly depression. I feel and he himself feels that occupation is his only hope. And when we both came to this conclusion I thought of Streamlet, its beauty, its quiet—”

“Oh, it's a promising enough little place! But, after all, it's only a river hamlet, a hollow in the knobs. I doubt if there will be anything here to interest him. His tastes, you know, aren't for the purely pastoral.”

“He's perceptive, very perceptive. And the sharp social contrasts here would interest anybody. Then you have some thoroughly good people—the Morrows, now. I remember Major Morrow with a great deal of pleasure. I sincerely hope—” His thin voice, which had in it a perpetually recurring quaver, like the motive in a strain of sorrowful music, faltered and failed. Dunbar started and lifted his heavy hand.

“Very well,” he said, “I'll do what you ask. Will you bring him down to the yards to-morrow? We'll see what can be fixed up. Perhaps nothing better at first than something in the way of inspecting. I suppose he can inspect? It isn't agreeable work.” He lifted

his hand again, this time in a gesture of warning, as the other burst out with a word of gratitude.

"The Bohun girl is just behind you," he advised Mr. Burkely, smiling. "She's talking to a drummer in the office. Alexa can, however, like many of her sex, talk and listen at once." And as the old man turned to speed an inquisitive glance through the great doorway, the mill president asked, "Do you remember Alexa? True, it's been some time since you were down here. I thought you might recall the little black-eyed, brown-legged girl who used to play around the boom-house in the days when Bohun lived there and cooked for the loggers. Alexa was something of a local celebrity in those times. She could walk the boom-sticks like a cat, and ride on the log cars in a most amazing fashion. Alexa's forgotten all those antics now. She's grown up, and is a person of considerable dignity. Don't remember her, eh? We mill folks have a warm spot in our hearts for Alexa."

II

THE hotel at Streamlet had been built on a highly imposing scale by certain projectors, who, when the new railway was laid out along the cliff, saw limitless possibilities in the little settlement at the joining of the rivers. The settlement was indeed only a scattering of poor sheds, all of them sunken in the pervasive dog-fennel of the lowlands, and with clapboarded roofs, gray and oblique in the shadow of the slopes. The only structure having any pretension of size or solidity sat midway of the hamlet—a weather-worn old house with a great stone chimney and a double gallery latticed in aged grape-vines. This dwelling had also some claim to distinction in the fact of having been during the war the headquarters of a general whose tents whitened the surrounding hills, and whose signals burned upon the brow of the sphinx-shaped knob brooding along the South Fork. Besides this single dwelling and its half-dozen neighboring cottages there was

nothing to substantialize that vision of a populous city which inspired the land company to the building of so large a house of entertainment. But the land company had the prophetic reach which is the common heritage of land companies; it considered that Streamlet already commanded the traffic of the Cumberland, and that the wedge-shaped little track already spanning the valley would unify this commerce with that of the great line tunnelling the Kentucky hills north and south of the town. In view of these things there was apparently nothing to do but to arrange valley and knobs in sections convenient for immediate sales, and to see to it that those who came to set afoot great enterprises in the new town should not lack suitable lodgement.

The hotel, therefore, almost at a breath, rose upon the beeched cliff overlooking the green slough destined to so great activities; but strangely enough, when the noise of building was over and the gables and minarets finished to the last shingle and a breadth of bunting arranged upon the flag-staff, an unexpected quietude settled over the place, and the footsteps of those who fared through the wide halls were hardly to be heard above the rush and rattle of the beeches leaning on the empty eaves. For there seemed fewer capitalists than

one would have thought who had long waited an opportunity of investing fortunes in saw and shingle mills, in stave works and spigot factories, and such other undertakings as are invited by mountain streams and boundless timber. Those who came paid fitting tributes to the scenery, indeed, but none of them stayed long, and the future of the town fortunately became a matter of natural growth.

It took so much time for the great saw-mill and various pulp works and tie offices and other concerns to establish themselves, that when things were finally in running order and the Nashville steamers had a landing and a freight-house, as well as a fixed business, the hotel had ceased being fine and imposing and wore a relaxed and careless air. After twelve or fifteen years of waiting in smart attire, it seemed to find the slipshod garb permitted to defeated hopes rather agreeable than otherwise. Considerable of its brownish paint had flaked off, leaving traces of the sodden boards revealed in the clinging scales, like glimpses of an aging face in a lace veil ; the lofty porch pillars had here and there rotted at the base ; the flooring yawned ; and the steps were warped into troughs where rain lingered long, and where, in sunny weather, certain lizards, spattered on the head as with red sealing-wax,

came to bask, snapping as they did so at unsuspecting gnats and the dancing shadows of the porch vines overhead. Above the bleached towers a colorless wisp of cotton floated from a bent stick in meagre reminder of the rainbow flag once furled there in the face of the beeches. These alone had gone from splendor to splendor, dusting the sky with impalpable green, spreading gracious shadows everywhere, thrusting kindly branches against the great office windows, otherwise curtainless and honey-combed with the alternating effects of many seasons, wet and dry.

“They ought to be cut out—those trees,” remarked Alexa to the young man with whom Mr. Burkely could see her in speech. “It’s so dark here I don’t know but I’ve got your change wrong. You better count it.” And Alexa inclined herself idly against the rim of the small cigar-case, yawning a little as she did so, and observing her finger nails critically. The young man dropped the silver pieces into his pocket. His expression seemed to indicate that he would prefer being dull and silent, if fate had not evilly sorted him a business in which animation and volubility are particularly desirable.

“Makes it rather gloomy,” he puffed, lighting a cigar.

“Gloomy!” repeated Alexa, casting her long, brown throat disgustedly aside. “Gloomy!” Alexa’s skin had the color of citron; iris and pupil met indefinitely in the blackness of her eyes, and her coarse silken hair, carelessly braided, shone with a violet lustre. Her slimness had a youthful angularity, and she moved with a loose-jointed effect approaching gracefulness. Something a little sullen, a little suspicious, inhered in her manner. With the richness of her coloring and her half-defiant, half-indifferent air, she gave the observer an idea of wild impulses and a sombre, almost tragic turn of character. As a matter of fact, the meditations of Alexa’s moody brows were seldom concerned with things more profound than the relative becomingness of red and pink ribbons, or the possible sentiments of those social magnates, the hill folk, regarding a young person, who, while she herself lived at present on the bluff, could not forget having once dwelt in the extremest depths of the bottoms. The days when she had lived across the South Fork and carried coffee in tin cups to the boom men, and walked the boom-sticks and paddled her dugout in the teeth of a “tide”—these shameless, happy days were become a thorn in Alexa’s heart. For a lofty, Persian idea of caste prevailed in Streamlet,

and those who lived above the railway were held to be of a different sort of clay from those who dwelt in the flats.

The hill folk themselves were unassuming enough, and they had never set afloat any theories relative to their distinction ; they had their business affairs in the bottoms with the villagers, occupying themselves in stores, factories, or various offices about the mill, and living in the simple way which is common to sensible people everywhere. But they could not escape the suspicion of haughty reserve put upon them by the burghers, and their well-meant cordialities were usually received by their neighbors of the valley with a chill distrust implying a fear of patronage. It was not strange if the hill folk, thus impeded stalled in spite of themselves, had perhaps in the course of the years come to accept the situation thus forced upon them, and to assume a certain belief in their own superiority.

“Gloomy !” said Alexa. “It’s like everything else here !” And she glanced round the immense, bare office, taking in its tall windows, its pillared ceiling, from which a great patch of mortar had fallen, leaving a section of grinning laths, its long counter, dented water-cooler, and rusty key-board.

“There’s never anything going on,” special-

ized Alexa, writing her name in the thick dust of the counter. "Of course, there's dances in the bottoms. But I never mix with the bottom people. Ma wouldn't hear it. And the hill folks—oh, they're sociable and all that, and if they got up anything I'd be asked—we're hill folks ourselves, as much as anybody!" she added, sharply. "But there's no girls of my age among 'em except Miss Lucy Morrow. She's considered mighty sweet, and some think she's right pretty. Not much color, maybe, but regular featured. Even her I don't see much of; she's mostly visiting her kin in the blue grass. Her mother's folks live up yender. This Mrs. Morrow's only her step-mother, you know. She's nice, though. Say, I wonder whose horse that is nickering at our gate?—Looks like Dr. Taliaferro's roan. There's doctor now, coming up the path. Him and Colonel Dunbar are great friends.—How do, doctor?"

The young man mounting the porch steps took off his hat, displaying a considerable crop of darkish hair, somewhat rumpled. "Good-day, Alexa," he said, in a ringing sort of voice which bore out the frank quality of his light, deeply embedded eyes. He looked square and strong, and also a little rough and heavy as he stood on the porch with pocketed hands

and a smile of greeting in his clipped, nondescript mustache. "I suppose you're quite well, Alexa? Anything more discouraging than the blooming healthfulness of this community!—why, nobody ever has anything more alarming than a risin'! What's that? Your mother's a little sick, eh?"

"Headachey," explained Alexa. "Will you wait while I see if she wants some powders?"

"I will, if you hurry," said the doctor. "I'm busy to-day. By-the-bye, Alexa, the *Daniel Boone* is finished; quite a trim little boat! The company is going to try her to-morrow if there's enough water to float her. They are going to run her to Mill Springs, and you are all invited to take the trip. You especially, Mr. Burkely, I was told to invite with all the pomp and ceremony at my command. Really, if the water holds out, I think you might enjoy it."

Alexa leaned pensively on the silver edge of the cigar-case. "Is it a hill affair?" she called out. "Of course, if it's going to be mixed—"

Taliaferro wheeled round. "Mixed! See here, Alexa, you little goose!—but I haven't time to waste with you just now. Go and see about those powders."

"What's all this press of haste?" asked Dunbar. "I thought you were just complaining of a lack of trade—eh? Is old Halifax Burns

having his weekly attack of heart-failure to-day? Gad! it's wonderful how much the human heart will stand,—how much whiskey, I should add. I suppose Burns hasn't been sober for twenty years;—and that poor, forlorn wife of his, I understand, has recourse to the same spring of consolation. Is this Burns's day, doctor?"

Taliaferro laughed. "No. No one's sick."

"No one sick, eh? These healthy knobs are no place for you, Taliaferro. You should have remained up in Woodford County, where you belong. Or are you only getting in your hand on us—eh? Or have you other designs here? Some enterprise not immediately connected with therapeutics—eh? eh?

Taliaferro, meeting the other's quizzical eye, flushed all over his rugged young face.

"Major Morrow's family, now," chuckled Dunbar, immensely taken with his own pleasantries—"of course, seeing so much of you, they would know if you have plans which you conceal from me. I intend to ask them. Miss Lucy Morrow, she probably has a pretty fair—"

"I'm going," cut in Taliaferro. "Alexa will have to get those powders another time."

Alexa had just crossed the threshold of the great room that lay behind the office and com-

manded by four cathedral-like windows a hilly backyard containing a pen in which a black hog, flown with insolence and superabundant slop, grunted contempt upon the lean kine in the outer pastures.

“Well!” cried Alexa, stopping short. “It’s a mercy I didn’t ask the doctor in—the way you look!” And she set a chastising eye upon her mother, who, seated in a rickety rocking-chair hard by an open window, made an apologetic murmur as she drew a side breadth of her blue cotton skirt across the various spots and stains of the front.

“I been too busy to think of cleaning up,” sighed Mrs. Bohun, impressively. “Besides, it wouldn’t pay me. I may have to go in the kitchen any minute. Kitty’s right triflin’, and you never know what help ’ll do. How’d I feel to put on a fresh i’ned apron and warsh my hands, and then find I had to turn in and go to cookin’? I got to think of these things, Elex.”

“Oh, goodness—”

“You ain’t as old as me, Elex. You’ll learn, as I’ve had to, that no person ever knows what’s before ’em,” insisted Mrs. Bohun, who was a long, thin woman of mild clay tints and a projecting upper jaw which gave her the look of maintaining a fixed, conciliatory smile. “I



“‘IT’S A MERCY I DIDN’T ASK THE DOCTOR IN’”

was saying only this morning to Mr. Burkely, s'd I, 'This hotel ain't kep' up like we'd like to keep it. By rights them windows had ought to be rinched off. But we never know when the place 'll be sold over us, and we'd feel pretty if it changed hands, and we had it to remember that we'd sozzled round warshin' windows for some one else ! Then, again,' s'd I, 'there's no fire-emyne in town ; and just as sure as I'd have the office floor mopped up the hull place 'd likely turn in and burn to a cender. Y' never know,' s'd I, 'for I can rickellicet once of throwing two buckets of water on to the front porch, and lo and behold, if it didn't set in to rain ! —'twas May a year ago—and the mud - tracks was shoe - mouth deep on my clean piazza ! Since then I ain't so enterprising to wear myself out a-slaving. What ain't done can't be ondone,' s'd I to Mr. Burkely. He said he sensed just how I felt, and that if more ladies had my idys they'd save theirselves a heap of trouble."

Alexa's eyes were ominous under their thick brows. "You went into the office and stood talking—in that old dress?"

"Elex, I had to go when he rung the counter bell. I thought 'twas the station agent wanting a cigar. I couldn't fly, could I, when I see Mr. Burkely and his nephew ? They'd

come on No. 8 and wanted rooms. But, law, they never noticed what I had on ! I held the register agin me."

Alexa let her despairing gaze rove about the familiar objects in the vast room. The organ with the stamped green cover and heaps of ragged music, the framed crayon portraits, odd tables, chests of drawers, and spidery camp-chairs seemed to impress themselves bitterly upon her.

"I wonder how I hold up my head at all," she cried out, "what with all I have to bear ! Between you and pa—"

"Elex !—now, honey, don't get to going on about your paw. He just thinks the world and all of you. Look at the organ he got you, and music lessons, and all ! He'd do anything for you. Of course he's a little notiony about religion."

"Notiony !—always arguing against it. Why can't he believe like other people ? The hill folks would think more of us if it wasn't for his talking."

Mrs. Bohun was twisting up her hair. She had two hair-pins in her mouth, and her voice strained itself reproachfully through the brass wires.

"Your paw ain't quite sure about there being a heaven and hell, Elex. I d' know as we

ought to be too hard on him. Of course I'd be better satisfied if he held for a hell. It don't matter so much about heaven." She listened. There was a sound of heavy footsteps in the corridor, and in a moment the door opened, admitting an elderly man, whose lumbering figure was incased to the armpits in trousers of a black-and-white stripe, accurately matching the streaks of the great beard overrunning his upper portions.

A kindly glance and a very complete row of lower teeth were prominent details of Mr. Bohun's appearance, and a conical felt hat and a pair of gaiters bulging with elastic wedges completed the matter of his attire.

"Here, Elex," he said, tossing her a letter—"here's tidings 'll cheer you. Seems a hull raft of railroaders from up yonder aim to come down to take supper with us next Saturday. They'll pack three pieces of music along, and dance till the midnight train. I knew you'd be pleased!"

"Pleased?" asked Alexa, with rigid eyelids. "Me?"

"Er—yes. They aim to dance—"

"I don't care what they aim to do. What are they to me? If it was my own friends I might have some reason for being pleased. Friends!—I'd have trouble to name any."

“Law, Elex !” broke in her mother. “Beau McBeath just thinks you’re the greatest person going ; and there’s plenty more. Don’t you pay no attention, paw. Elex is only a little put out because you ain’t a professor.”

“She is, is she ?” asked Mr. Bohun. “I ‘ain’t no excuses to make, Melindy. I was born to reason and I got to keep at it. Does she think I do it for pastime—addlin’ my brains with spec’lations about time and eternity ? Lord ! I remember when I was light-minded and cheerful as any person, and never knowed it was given me for to pierce to the true in’ardness of things. My powers of seeing through things came on me in the twinkling of a eye.”

“Yes, paw ; we’ve heard you tell about it.”

“It was fifteen year back,” pursued Mr. Bohun, unrelentingly. “I’d put me in four acre of tobacco and the plants was all taking hold, and I was feeling mighty fine viewing that stretch of shoots. And up came a flooding rain and washed out every last blade ! Well, sirs, I sot on a fence rail cussin’ mad. And ‘long came parson on his sorrel nag. ‘I hope you’re resignated,’ says he. ‘It’s all for the best. The A’mighty has done it.’ ‘He has ?’ says I. ‘Certain,’ says he. ‘Well,’ says I, ‘then all I got to say is that, take him up one

side and down the other, he does as much harm as he does good.'"

"And parson 'lowed you'd be brought low for them words, didn't he?"

"Yes'm, yes'm, he did. But the scales had fell from my eyes, and no words of hisn could put 'em back. Though I told him then and I've told him since that I'm willin' to be persuaded, if him or any other exhorter can do it. And Elex can't say but what I go to church reg'lar, and always walk front and shake the preacher's hand after meetin' and tell him how sorry I am that his argyment hasn't fetched me. Ain't that the truth?"

"Yes, paw. But you ought to try and soften your heart, seems like."

"'Tain't my business," protested Mr. Bohun, rising to attend to the office bell. "It's theirn. If they can't do it they'll have it to answer for."

III

“Of course,” said Mr. Burkely to his nephew, “I hardly expect that, feeling as you do, there is much prospect of your enjoying this excursion to—what is the place? Mill Springs, isn’t it? M-m. But in any case it will do you good—take your mind off yourself. The fact is, Burkely, that you dwell too much on the—the past. You must try to get in a healthier state of mind—really you must. This office in the mills isn’t a big thing; but it’s a footing, and if you take hold and buckle right down to business—” He finished the sentence with an encouraging nod. “We shall see.”

They were walking slowly down the hill road, Mr. Burkely gesticulating as he avoided the loose stones, Dillon following the deep wagon-ruts with abstracted eyes. It was nine of the morning, and the local freight train could still be heard rounding the curves below the town. Its steadily decreasing sounds came

to the ear in a monotonous murmur, which now and again broke out loud and clear as some jut of the cliff's base cast the clamor sharply back into the maw of the valley. Geese were cackling in a lush green common below the hill, and a cow-bell echoed faint and hollow from the rough pasturage on the summit of the sphinx-shaped knob. In a clump of thick old trees at the foot of this outstretched knoll the house of the commanding general stood gray and massive, bulwarked with its roughly built chimney, and with a rich overflow of grape leafage in its two long galleries. Before the riven picket fence a man was mending a fish-net, which, bulged to perfect rotundity with a barrel hoop, hung in airy meshes from an apple-tree springing midway of the road.

"You are too good to me," said Dillon, half absently lifting his eyes upon the little houses along the descent of the hill. "I wish I felt as if all your kindness were worth while."

"If you're going to talk like that— But I sha'n't listen. You aren't yourself yet. Wait till this air has a chance to straighten you out. And the simple, natural life! These things will do wonders for you. Last night when we sat a moment in the threadbare hotel parlor, listening to Bohun's girl play her poor little tunes on the rattle-trap of a piano, I said to

myself that there was tonic in the least of these homely details of village life. I looked at Bohun, tranced as he was in pride at his daughter's musical—by-the-bye, Burkely, I believe that is the Bohun girl ahead of us in the road, isn't it?—turning the post-office corner there, with those red things in her hat—eh?"

"Seems to be," replied Dillon, in his listless tones.

They had reached now the business quarter of the town, where three stores with high porches faced down a turnip field, and a barn-like structure having Masonic devices in ultramarine over its secretive upper window. Beyond this the rivers shone and murmured in their drift-fringed banks, and the great saws of the mills filled the morning with a sweet, fluty music. It had rained up the Cumberland, apparently, but the South Fork country had not caught much, and its green, untroubled waters broke in a crystal rim against the stirring yellowness of the deeper current.

The ferry, a mere float of broad planks, throbbed in the swirl of the meeting streams. Below it, issuing a ruddy and insistent blast, the *Daniel Boone*, with a red gang-plank thrust impudently outward, like a gamin's tongue, nosed the crumbling ochreous clay of the bank. A fringe of bare, boyish legs dangled

over the edge of its tiny hurricane-deck ; a press of girls' faces thickened below ; and farther down on the little main-deck, protected with a heavy stock-guard, numbers of men lounged, waiting for the start.

"Are we late ?" asked Mr. Burkely, crossing the plank.

"Oh no !" answered Taliaferro, greeting him. "But the sooner we get off the better ; for the bottom is visibly dropping out of the river, and some of us might find it inconvenient to get hung up on the shoals for the summer." He laughed as he led the way up a ladder-like flight of steps to the other deck, which was gay with starched muslins and a confusion of voices.

Dillon, coming suddenly into this atmosphere of unfamiliar faces and laughter and chatter and general bewilderment, found his glance taken by the garland of scarlet flowers which had preceded him in the hill road. Leaning against the rail, Alexa Bohun was giving ear, with extreme indifference, to something which a good-looking young fellow, having a country freshness of cheek under his broad felt hat, was saying in an eager, earnest sort of fashion. There could be little doubt about the young man's deep concern with the matter of his speech ; but Alexa, in listening,

merely shrugged her shoulders and dropped her heavy lashes in a way directly significant of weariness. Once she waved off the subject in discussion with an imperative gesture, abruptly turning her black, poppy-wreathed hat. When she caught sight of Taliaferro and Dillon these tokens of distaste and languor vanished, and an air of smiling consciousness replaced them. Observing it, Dillon had a sense of wondering repugnance, so little these coquettices harmonized with the girl's fashion of mortality. Her attire, too, struck some byway of disgust in his mind, and he was aware of being dimly surprised that a creature possessing beauty so serious and profound in its suggestiveness should have seemingly almost no æsthetic sense.

When in the course of a haphazard inconsequent talk he mentioned to Taliaferro his discomfort in Alexa's sidelong glances and vulgarizing knots and ends of cheap red ribbon, the doctor looked towards the girl with the air of a man who has never before sensibly taken stock of the object in question.

"She's really getting to be handsome," he admitted, in a tone indicating opinion rather than consciousness. "I never noticed her particularly before. She *has* got a lot of ribbon on, hasn't she?—tied up like a box of chocolates. Poor Alexa! I reckon she hasn't an

idea that the archly gay and slyly demure aren't her style. I don't suppose she knows she has a style. To tell the truth, I'd never ciphered it out myself. Now that you call my attention to her, however, I can see that the Phædra sort of business would be directly in her line. To tell the truth, I am, even now, less impressed with her looks than with the abominable way she is, as usual, treating Beau McBeath. Eh? That's he she's tolerating at present. Poor beggar! He's in a bad way, Beau is. Devoted to the fatuous point, you see. Oh, he isn't particularly brilliant, Beau isn't. But he's a kindly chap, and he's loved her since she was a black-skinned little river-rat living yonder in the boom-house. Misfortune has always seemed to be Beauregard's portion in life. I don't know that his lack of success in this instance ought to occasion remark."

Dillon regarded the broad felt hat of Beauregard McBeath with a moderate accession of interest. "He doesn't look like a man 'reserved and destined to peculiar woe.'"

"No. He's got a rather cheerful bloom. But have you never heard Mr. Burkely or any one else speak of the McBeath walnut tract? It's celebrated among lumbermen, and rather a sad and complicated history belongs to the

wood. It seems that about thirty years ago Beauregard's father and a friend of the name of Conner came into this section and settled in Wayne in a magnificently wooded stretch overlooking the South Fork. They built them a house of logs, all chinked and sealed comfortable, and things went well with them till they both fell in love with a girl—the same girl, unhappily. From what I learn, Conner had the inside track. But whatever his position was it really didn't matter in the end ; for one day he was found under one of the walnut-trees dead. There were very obvious evidences of foul play ; but McBeath for some reason wasn't suspected, though he took possession, without question, of his partner's share in the estate and married his partner's sweetheart. He didn't prosper, however. Poetic justice, rare in this plain world, overtook him. All his children, except Beau, died in infancy ; his wife was half demented for a time over their loss ; his property ran through his hands like water ; he came finally to own nothing besides the walnut wood, and whatever his needs he wouldn't sell a stick of it. When he lay dying, two years ago, it is generally believed that he made a clean breast of his guilt regarding Conner. At all events, he exacted from his wife and son an oath that they would never sell

the walnut till it was demonstrated that Conner had died without heirs. For it appears that old McBeath had known more or less definitely of a sister of Conner's, away back in Virginia. He had tried, under the prick of conscience, to find her, and had failed in his efforts because he feared, I imagine, to call suspicion on himself after so many years by a too zealous search. The matter stands as he left it. Beau, if he were left to his own followings, might fail to see his obligations to carry out these bequests. But everything was left to his mother, and she is a person of determined character. I believe she applies every cent she can lay hands on to the furtherance of the search for Conner's sister, who, Beau tells me, is supposed to have gone West about the time of her brother's death. Meanwhile Beau is too occupied with Alexa to have any determinate ideas about anything else." And the doctor, pausing, lifted to his shoulder a very little girl who had run towards him from across the deck. This small person observed Dillon shyly with a pair of brown eyes which glimmered from beneath the frill of a white garden hat in a particularly coy manner.

"This," explained Taliaferro, "is Miss Corinne Morrow, a friend of whose devotion I have long assured myself.—Corinne, if you like

to be polite to Mr. Dillon I think I can stand it. You may shake hands with him if you think well of it." Corinne looked first at her bare, dimpled knees; then she inspected her old-fashioned, single-strapped slippers.

"Won't you come and show me about the boat?" insinuated Dillon. "I should be very grateful."

"You do not hear the enchanter's voice, do you, Corinne?" asked Taliaferro. "I am sorry, Mr. Dillon. But you see how fully the aspersed constancy of her sex is vindicated in Corinne."

"I am very lonesome," sighed Dillon, touching Corinne's light hair. "I shall probably get lost or fall overboard or something, unless some one looks after me."

"No use," cried the doctor, gayly; but he fetched up rather suddenly, for Corinne had begun to twist and wriggle in her seat upon his shoulder.

"Lem me go!" she whispered, loudly. "You won't get hurt or nothing if I go. But he's strange. He needs me more 'n you."

"Go, traitress!" Taliaferro resigned her in feigned displeasure. "Go, then, false one," he said.

Above his voice and Dillon's triumphant exclamation broke just now a clear, sweet clang

of rushing water, and ahead of the prow there flashed in sight a bubbling, breaking reach of green-and-white ripples, that flecked the air above the sharp rocks with wisps of spray and tufts of foam.

The boat seemed to be lessening in speed; then two brawny negroes, whose wet legs shone like new bronze, could be seen wading ashore, burdened with heavy coils of rope. These long hempen strands they fastened about posts on the rising banks, by way of aiding the steamer through the shallows, and, as the stones of the river-bed bit and nibbled at the hull, the whistle blew shrilly for a landing, and above, on a green hill-side, a solitary house of bleached logs crept in view. Below it a miserable field, weedy with a foot-high sprout, sloped to the water-side, where three stray oak ties, patrolled by a frog and a man in butternut jeans, made a landing for the steamer. A barrel of molasses was consigned to the charge of these functionaries, and the *Daniel Boone* grated round again into mid-stream.

Always the extreme bending of the river's course gave the view the look of a lake forever moving onward and changing the aspect of its shore, while it kept its pool-like oval unimpaired. In the clear bosom of these depths a succession of great clouds plunged their puffy

white shoulders ; in shadowy places along the banks thick flakes of corky spume floated ; and hundreds of airy insects, dipping and spinning on the still surface, sent innumerable concentrics whirling to the boat's edge. Sometimes the trees of the slopes grew so near the stream that their leaning lower branches were enamelled in a dry glaze of white mud, and reached over the water a frosty filigree, hard as jade. And everywhere the foliage of the crests along the river flung upon the blue skies a green as delicate and intangible as if scattered there with a handful of soft chalks, crumbling to the breath.

Dillon, with a word of commiseration for Taliaferro's discomfiture, followed Corinne forward. A clatter of dishes was rising from below, the throng of women had considerably thinned, and preparations for luncheon were apparently forward. Under the big illuminator Mr. Burkely was seated in what seemed to be a very animated conversation with two ladies. Both, Dillon saw, wore gowns of thin white. The older was noticeably abundant in her matronly outlines, and had a soft, flushing cheek and a drooping, sentiment-suggesting profile. She attended to Mr. Burkely with many little sympathetic inclinations of her full throat and with occasional small, cooing sighs,

which perceptibly lifted the bosom and seemed even to stir the gloss of auburn hair along the brows.

“My mamma,” said Corinne, pointing.

“Yes?” acquiesced Dillon; and as the child, taking his hand, began to draw him towards the group, he said, “We won’t go over there just now. They are busy talking.”

Corinne’s flower-like lips fell apart as she looked up at him. “Don’t you want to talk to Lucy?” she propounded, in an amazed accent. “Doctor always wants to.”

Dillon began to smile. “I don’t know Lucy, you see,” he explained, with a glance towards the slighter of the two white-gowned figures near his uncle. It happened that Lucy—if this young woman were she—sat with head averted, so that he could not very well judge what she was like. He could see only the line of a beautifully pale cheek and the rim of an ear half hidden in loosely worn, perfectly straight hair, shining and light.

“I know how to introduce,” specified Corinne, with all the dignity of her four years. But Dillon said, frowning a little, “Another time.” He was lost in a momentary wonder as to whether any subject other than himself could be inspiring his uncle’s talk with so vivid a note of interest.

"It is more than kind of you," Mr. Burkely indeed was saying, "to promise to make my boy feel at home in Streamlet. I—I hoped you would be good to him." And he added, in a sudden, impulsive way, "He needs such influences. He has—Mrs. Morrow, I feel as if I ought to tell you that he has been a little wild. Only a baby when he came to me, poor little chap. I did all I could to spoil him."

Mrs. Morrow expanded in a gentle sigh. "Nothing touches me like the sight of one who is motherless," she said. "Lucy was only ten years old when I first saw her in her little black frock, and I shall never forget my sensations. Lucy, dear, do you recall how I wept on the day when your papa brought me home and you ran to meet us and kissed me first?—little thin thing that you were!"

"Ah," broke in Mr. Burkely, as she paused, "if my boy had only known something better than an old man's indulgence! What most discourages me, Mrs. Morrow, is his depression. He broods continually over the fact that he has wasted his powers and opportunities and defeated my hopes. He needs spirit, sympathy—"

"I understand—a refined, sensitive nature. I shall feel it a blessed privilege to do everything I can to inspire him with new ambitions. I have often felt that there is no

more noble office in life than to sustain the weak and strengthen those that falter."

Mr. Burkely had risen in listening to her fluttering voice. He felt some gratification to think that without prejudicing Mrs. Morrow against his nephew, he had honorably suggested all that blemished the young man's past. There was with him no suspicion that the vague atmosphere of sin and suffering in which he had invested Dillon might have the effect of heightening his interest as no narration of an entirely moral and catechism flavor could do. Without formulating it directly, the old man had been sure that Mrs. Morrow could be relied on to see his nephew's case in a benevolent aspect. He had felt that Dillon's deserts would not concern her so much as the features of her own Christian duty. She would, in the simple graciousness of her heart, put charity in the seat of judgment, and to the utmost replace with pure generosity whatever hinted at justice. Mr. Burkely had indeed reckoned so correctly upon the intimations of Mrs. Morrow's mild face that a contenting sense of his own penetration mingled itself with his pleasure in her words. And as he spoke to her of his gratification, telling her how his heart was lightened in having secured for his nephew her own and her daughter's kind-

ness, it came upon him rather forcibly that Miss Morrow had not said anything to lead him to rely upon her good-will in the case in question. She had not spoken at all; and he grew suddenly fearful that her silence, which he had noted only as a proper and maidenly abstinence from the speech of her elders, might have been calmly critical, after the habit of the modern young woman, of whom he knew nothing except that she was said to be infinitely more sagacious than the girls of his own youth.

In his startled glance, Lucy's eyes, which had both brown and gray in their clear, agate-like depths, were rather disquieting in the simple directness of their gaze. That level look suggested that this slight young person in the wide leghorn hat might, in an unpleasant modern way, be capable of some elementary deliberations as to the final results of shielding men from the effects of their misdoings. Undoubtedly there was a hint of severity in Lucy's face, a mere structural note, which, though barely intimated, gave it such definiteness and direction as the branch of a flowering tree gives to the fragile blossoms covering it. Mr. Burkely, taking apprehensive stock of this trait, heard, as from a distance, the soft reiterations of Mrs. Morrow's sympathy.

"Are we not all weak and erring?" she was inquiring of him. "We, with our faults, what are we that we should look narrowly into the ways of our brother? Your nephew, Mr. Burkely—can that be he who is walking yonder with my little Corinne?"

Mr. Burkely focused his eyes on Dillon's back. "Yes, that is he standing near Dr. Taliaferro. If I might bring him to you—"

"Do so," said Mrs. Morrow, palpitating with easy benevolence. "Lucy, have you seen Dr. Taliaferro?"

Lucy looked up, smiling in response to Taliaferro's greeting; and as she did so she saw beside him a young man, tall, slender, leaning a little at the shoulders. He looked gentle and sad, and she was conscious of wondering that gentleness and sadness should be so markedly characteristic of a man given to prodigalities of any sort. The curiosity which Mr. Burkely's indeterminate disclosure had aroused in her began to be a little touched with pity as she observed Dillon's pallor and air of weariness. And as she sat in the low deck-chair with her hands crossed in her white lap, and this expression of half-compassionate wonder on her face, an air so youthful, so child-like encompassed her that Mr. Burkely, observing it, forgot his earlier impressions in a sudden

qualm. He drew his shaggy white brows down. If this girl had been his own daughter would he have wished her to do for Dillon, or such as Dillon, what he had just asked her to do? Was there nothing polluting for her in such associations of friendliness as he himself was planning for her? Had he been entirely right in sketching Dillon's tale in colors so misty?

He felt himself trembling, with an actual weakening of the joints, and a dull color mantling his cheek-bones. Even yet he did not mean to speak, to undo what he had done, and turn from Dillon's lips a cup that might perhaps have life in its draught. He seemed to himself to be trying to be silent; but despite these efforts to collect and calm himself, he became aware that he had drawn a step closer to Mrs. Morrow, and was stammering, "I should have said more than I did . . . more; I should have told you . . . something more . . ."

IV

LUCY herself had a not unreasonable surprise at Mr. Burkely's words and manner. It was impossible not to take, in their simplest import, the old man's sudden confusion and faltering phrases. That he had been moved to vivify his nephew's story with a graphic detail seemed past question, and Lucy, in a momentary consideration of his shaken and uncertain air, began to think that perhaps her own presence might have kept him from speaking as frankly as upon second thought he felt that he should have spoken.

She rose rather hurriedly. She did not fancy that she was at all likely to be horrified by anything which Mr. Burkely might wish to divulge concerning the spiritless-looking young man standing hard by ; her instinct was altogether one of sympathy with the struggle which was so evident in the lean face before her. But in the instant of rising she saw a change in the old man. Composure had returned to him ; he held

himself erect, and his thready, bluish lips ceased trembling. Catching Dillon's eye, he made him a little gesture.

"I was about to say," he remarked, turning again to Mrs. Morrow, "that—that you mustn't take Dillon's self-accusations seriously! He is particularly hard on himself—particularly so! Ah, my boy! I have very great pleasure—" He rubbed his hands together and inclined his shoulders in hurrying through some form of introduction, while Dillon took, with a kind of appealing, ingratiating diffidence, the hand which Mrs. Morrow held to him in an excess of cordiality.

Lucy bent her head a little distantly, being still occupied with the idea that Mr. Burkely had meant to elucidate in Dillon's career some point which he had finally decided to leave untouched. The matter, however, soon drifted from her mind, and she found herself presently in talk with Taliaferro and Dillon, thinking less of the possible defections of the latter than of the varying waters all about, and the summer blueness overhead, swept in a long, tenuous glare of white.

Just ahead the Mill Springs landing came in sight. At its verge a pink skiff reduplicated its rosy stern in the still water that, with the approach of the *Daniel Boone*, began to heave

and pulse and disturb the green shadows dyeing the current along shore. There followed the lively excitement of debarkation, and afterwards came an hour's wandering through dingles and dells and deep roadways and rocky slopes. Upon the return to Streamlet the sun was setting, and a low crimson turbanned the dark uplands and filled the valley with a strange glamour. A train was issuing from the black arch of the tunnel which gives upon the high-swung bridge across the Cumberland cliffs, and the headlight of its engine seemed a fluttering shred of sunset caught from the radiance behind the sheer wall of the western bluffs.

Taliaferro, with Corinne drowsing on his shoulder, walked through the dim bottoms in Lucy's company. It was very quiet in the curbless streets. In the post-office a light burned, and a few loungers smoked on the steps of the different stores. At the foot of the hill a little group of people had stopped to rest a moment before the climb; and as Lucy and the doctor approached, Alexa Bohun, leaving the throng of tired voyagers, joined them.

“Why, say,” she began, locking her arm in Lucy's, “we're going to have a hop at the hotel on Saturday—folks from up the road. I thought maybe you'd like to come and look

on? Of course you wouldn't wish to take part! *I sha'n't. Ma wouldn't hear to it,*" specified Alexa, who commonly represented her mother as a person of established social prejudice.

Lucy laughed. "I'm afraid I should want to take part," she said. "I love to dance."

"Sure 'nough?" asked Alexa, heartened at this admission. "Me—now a banjo sets me all a-quiver. You'll come for certain, then?" She gave Lucy's hand a squeeze and bounded back to rejoin the others.

"Alexa quite forgot to include you in her invitation," Lucy said to Taliaferro, as she paused to loosen the strings of Corinne's hat. "There! poor little soul. She was half strangled."

"Oh, I'm a fixture of the establishment," smiled the doctor. He stood looking at Lucy before him in the road, with the mysterious rosiness of the afterglow in her face. Her broad hat swung from her arm, and the twilight redness robbed her parted hair of its usual pale lustre. Taliaferro's heart lifted. It was no uncommon sensation with him in Lucy's presence. Every one in Streamlet, unless it were Lucy herself, knew the trend of the young man's affections, and why it was that with a choice of better things profes-

sionally he kept on staying in the little mountain town. He had come to the place something like two years before to undertake to end the lawless operations of some tie-makers who were working the timber off a tract of land which his father had left him. And in the intervals of his bouts in the behalf of property rights he had fallen into a certain practice of his profession. At first he had meant to stay in Streamlet only long enough to get his affairs settled before going abroad for an extension of his studies; but after things were quite arranged, and the tie-makers had been made to leave off their depredations, and all was as it should be, Taliaferro became aware that his desire for travel had lapsed.

Lucy had come home from school, and the doctor soon became sufficiently clear regarding his feelings for her. As to Lucy's own sentiments, there was, unhappily, more ground of doubt. She was always glad, indeed, to discuss his plans with him, and even to advise him concerning the serious matters of both life and medicine. But in her tranquil friendliness Taliaferro found nothing reassuring, until, upon a statement to Mrs. Morrow of his hopes and fears, he received from her certain encouraging comments and counsels. Mrs. Morrow's abounding emotions and cooing mur-

murs and breathless interjections of sympathy had perhaps been of considerable effect in heartening Taliaferro's suit. He could not afterwards recall just what she had said to cheer him so effectually, but he gathered from her talk with him that he must be content to await developments, and not be so rash as to force upon Lucy's mind the startling revelation that he loved her. The solemn, fathomless mystery which invests the mental processes of maidenhood must, Mrs. Morrow pointed out, be respected. And she added to her subtle discriminations on this score the questionable declaration that patience and reserve in a lover are infallible aids to success.

To-night, as the twilight deepened about him and he climbed the hill with Lucy beside him, almost the doctor felt himself come to the force of words. But when Lucy turned to him in some remark, her face's unconsciousness smote him painfully, and he drew his brows and replied with a hint of gruffness in his voice.

This brusque tone of his and the embarrassment of feeling which made him appear stolid and silent as they walked home together recurred to Lucy upon the following night. Mr. Burkely and his nephew had come to pay their respects to the Major's family, and when, in

the course of the evening some one spoke of Taliaferro, Mr. Burkely said: "Mr. Dunbar expatiates upon this young man's qualities. I haven't the least doubt that the doctor is a fine fellow, but it seems to me that he lacks—er—manner, you know." Dillon had scarcely spoken. He sat, with his usual air of languor, in a corner of the pretty room, passively aware of the summer lightness of the wicker chairs and pale rugs, and the breath of the long-stemmed roses in a great bowl in the window-seat. But as his uncle paused, with a questioning glance as for corroboration in his opinion, Dillon moved a little.

"I should think," he said, "that Taliaferro had the best possible manner for a physician—one which inspires immediate confidence." Lucy looked visibly pleased. Dillon's remark established him in her mind as a person of fairness and penetration, and she was sensible of regretting that such a one should be so openly wearied with the evening's events as Mr. Dillon appeared.

Dillon was, in fact, thinking of the charms of the rose-hedged walk outside and the pungent odors of a cigar. His uncle's incessant liveliness irritated him, nor did he find Mrs. Morrow's lavish amiability satisfying, nor Lucy's slight presence and dreamy silence in the least

interesting. Major Morrow himself maintained the ponderous quietude which had won him his repute for extraordinary dignity and intelligence. He was an immovable-looking man, whose iron-gray eyes bulged as if the hardening of the rubicund flesh about them had pushed them from their sockets. He had a military fashion of gray mustache, and a habit of patting his knee and sealing his lips in a way to suggest deep deliberations. Whatever these might be, the Major seldom committed himself to speech. He spent his days in meditation ; business affairs and the Major had nothing in common. He had, indeed, some sort of silent partnership in a pulp factory below the hill ; but war had been his first active interest in life, and nothing had replaced it for him.

“Major hain’t no fancy sojer,” old Halifax Burns would say, as the Major stalked majestically up the post-office steps every morning at ten of the clock. “He fit mighty brash down yender in *Tennessy*. Charged onct in his shirt-sleeves, they tell. He hain’t no wounds into his back, Major hain’t! And now that the Dimmycrats hes got in, through the grace of God, y’all needn’t be surprised to see ‘em put Major into position and pay him big money.”

Dillon knew nothing of Major Morrow’s prow-

ess, and the Major's monosyllabic conversation did not hold the young man's fancy. He experienced a deep relief when Mr. Burkely finally rose, and this was furthered as they emerged from the rose-hedged garden upon a moonlighted sweep of turf. At their feet the cliff sheered abruptly to the railway. To the west the Cumberland bridge swung like a ribbon of white satin, caught in the tangled black leafage of the tunnel's mouth. Along the brow of the bluff little depressions showed where the rifle pits and batteries of General Burnside had been long before. About the unlighted town the heights were drawn like heavy curtains. Back from the bluff the few houses of the hill folk nestled in their checkered garden spaces. Through the panes of one the engineer's wife could be seen rocking her baby. In the door of a gabled white cottage the preacher's aging figure revealed itself upon the inner light.

On the station platform a brakeman sat winding a strip of red flannel about his lantern, and the scarlet rays fell upon a number of men lounging against the wall. Behind the iron bars of the station window the agent sat on a high stool, posting his accounts. Dunbar was coming up the hill, and as Mr. Burkely and Dillon rounded the platform a woman in a trailing cotton frock, bareheaded, and with a

heavy child in her arms, came in sight, stepping along the tracks from tie to tie. She was young, and her pink-and-white face had the dulness that knows neither honor nor shame. Tripping in her long skirts, she stumbled on into the darkness.

“Poor soul,” remarked Bohun, rising from a freight truck. “Eh? Why, it’s Lete Haight, the woman that lives under the trestle. Eh? Oh, I reckon there’s no use in denyin’ that she’s triflin’. Only the age of my Elex, poor soul! Her mother was a headstrong, mean-inclined critter, but she was tol’able well-favored, and Duke Haight he must go to work and marry her. Nice, steady feller he was. He knowed she’d change her ways and make him a fine wife. And she did! She made him a fine one—kept him in misery with her doings till he died. This Lete’s their gyrl. After her folks died she took to wanderin’ round. She’s never hed no encouragement to hold her head up. Well, Duke Haight had good intentions. Only he didn’t ‘pear to understand that you can’t stop bad wood from rotting by bracing it up with sound timber. The sound timber ’ll rot, that’s all that ’ll happen.”

“Good intentions,” said Mr. Burkely, sententiously, “often contain a good deal of latent mischief.”

Dunbar was mopping off his forehead. "Well," he speculated, "I reckon that's so. Altruism, as our friend Spencer justly remarks, is a blessed thing up to a certain point; but beyond that point it's a curse to giver and receiver. Mr. Haight's proceeding seems to lie beyond the line of mutual blessing."

V

IN Alexa's room, high in one of the shingled towers, two oil lamps burned brightly, burnishing the railway maps and soap advertisements which decorated the white walls. An ingrain carpet, compounded of strips of varying designs, spread its lengths along the floor. The high bed, draped in a homespun coverlet, had an obvious effect of graining combed in brown paint over its yellow foot-board. A folded newspaper covered the wash-stand, and the wavy mirror of the tall bureau was sustained in an oblique position by means of an inthrust hair-brush.

A pile of ruffled petticoats heaped the bed. Alexa's frock, a flowery heap of pink muslin, lay across a chair. Alexa herself, with her black hair about her shoulders, and a flush of excitement staining the pellucid brown of her cheeks, stood testing the heat of the curling-irons she had just taken from the globe of a lamp.

"You're going to look mighty sweet," said Mrs. Bohun, who sat in a limp huddle near the door, watching her daughter twist a strand of hair about the tongs.

"What are they all doing down-stairs, ma?"

"Dressin' and primpin'," responded her mother. "The gyrls all packed along their gownds in bandboxes, and they're skirmishin' through the halls a-lacin' and hookin' each other, and callin' for pins and whitenin', and going on till Kitty and Sa' Jane hain't a mite of sense. The gents is blackin' their boots and puttin' on clean collars. Rowin' on the river like they been since they got off the train has sweated 'em out, I reckon. I won't say as any of 'em has toted a flask along," remarked Mrs. Bohun, with an air of rigorous moral accuracy, "but it 'peared to me like I caught a whiff of Belle of Nelson as I came past the room where the men are at. Or it might 'a' been Old Crow or even Buck Creek. God knows. The music is eating a sandwich off the kitchen table, and your paw is packing chairs and tables out of the dining-room so's dancing can begin."

Alexa warily drew the iron from a tubular ringlet. "Mr. Dillon—is he—"

"Mr. Dillon's on the porch with his heels agin a post and his hat into his eyes, smoking,

like he always is. Looks like he's lower spereted than ever since his uncle went away for good. I feel kind of sorry for him, Elex. I'd of put a nice clean newspaper on to his wash-stand to-day to sort of make his room more home-like, only I just says to myse'f, 'If I do, why, like as not he'll splash around, cleanin' up for the hop, and soak it to a pulp.' There's your paw callin' me." And having answered "Whoo!" in a loud voice, Mrs. Bohun dragged her festal black cashmere from the room.

Down in the office a dozen or more young men were gathered. Some of them revealed themselves as brakemen by the slight swaying of their gait in crossing the pillared expanse. A conductor or two and an engineer were among the loiterers on the porch who, in a smoke-encircled group, were listening to a story involving prodigious presence of mind and a surpassing mastery of the throttle. Fragments of the tale, interspersed with comments of different sorts, floated to the piazza end in which Taliaferro and Dillon and others of the hotel's usual dwellers sat together under the hanging vines, which, struck here and there with flashes of light from the office doors and windows, seemed heavy with mysterious clusters of vague white flowers. The tentative rasp of a violin bow and the lisp of a banjo string

came from the dining-room, which was bare of its usual furnishings, and showed unbroken stretches of pale-green, mildew-blotched wall. Mr. Bohun, with his conical hat awry and an expression of excited interest in his great black-and-white beard, pervaded the apartment, issuing loud orders to the small negro boy who filled the offices of bell-boy, waiter, and porter in the hotel.

Presently the strains of a waltz welled from the table on which the three black musicians sat, and in a moment more the empty spaces were roused with a whir of muslins, a rap of heels, a confusion of voices and laughter.

People were also beginning now to come by twos and threes up the hotel path, scattering along the porch and stationing themselves outside the window which commanded a view of the festivities. The engineer's wife, with her blond young face; the preacher's niece, old-maidish and overcome with spasms of giddiness at the gayety of the music; the school-master, large and soft and serene, with his dark little wife on his arm—these and others of the hill folk thronged the outer ways, and were finally persuaded to enter and seat themselves in a reserved and exclusive row of chairs sequestered near the kitchen door.

Alexa, with a rosy fillet through her hair,

was essaying a few reluctant steps with Beauregard McBeath, whose long, light frock-coat rendered a trifle more conspicuous the awkwardness of his efforts.

"After seeing Beauregard dance I am inclined to sympathize with Alexa's coolness," said Taliaferro, looking in from the doorway. And as Alexa turned at length from her partner with a disdaining lift of lips, the doctor drew the unhappy young man aside and soothed him in such sort as he was able.

"I don't know but I'd be as well off to go and throw myself in Fishing Creek," remarked McBeath, accepting a cigar. "I took six lessons in dancing last winter; the fellow said I had it down fine. Yes; he told me my waltzing was out of sight. But Alexa won't have it that way. She says I move like my feet was weighted for a trotting gait. Sometimes, doc, I think I better give up. It certainly don't look as if things 'd ever come my way!" McBeath paused, experimentally, but Taliaferro did not attempt to combat this view. "Yet," pursued Alexa's suitor, after a moment, in which his hopes seemed to reach their lowest level and begin to rise again, "Alexa often lets me tell her how much I think of her and the kind of a house I aim to build when that walnut tract of ours gets settled. Tell you,

if 'twasn't for that sister of Conner's I'd be fixed. I'd put me up a stylish house, and Alexa 'd quit doing like she does."

"How do things stand about the Conner heirs, Mac?"

"Oh, same as common. Old Judge Kinney, he does our lawing, you know. He was down several months ago, and I was plumb sure he'd come to say we was free to sell the wood any day. He looked like he fetched news; but after I'd put his horse up and came back to the house I found him and maw talking about the crops and never a word of no Maria Conner. 'News, Judge?' says I. And my mother—you know how quick spoken she is—says she, 'When the Judge has news it 'll be for my ears, Beau, before yourn.' So there 'tis. When the Judge was leaving I says to him, 'Do you reckon that Conner's sister's really alive?' And he shut his eyes critical, and says he, 'There certainly was a Maria Conner that kept a boarding-house in Butte City a year ago. She moved to the foot-hills som'er's,' says he, 'and when I hear from her I'll let you know.'"

Taliaferro was conscious of a divided interest. At the gate was a flutter of airy white and a mingling of tones; and presently Major Morrow and his wife came in view in the path. Taliaferro looked for Lucy, but Lucy seemed

to have stopped in the neighborhood of the gate, for her voice came clearly to him. Very soon he saw her emerging from the dusk, moving slowly towards the house, and holding her light skirts from contact with the dewy grasses by the way. Dillon was beside her. He was smiling as he listened to what she was saying, and his face wore a look of interest and amusement. In the wide wash of light from the door they paused, and Lucy's face, the shine of her hair, and the transparent whiteness of her broad sleeves appeared to be themselves luminous.

Beyond her Dillon's slightly bent shoulders and fine, pensive profile were impressed upon the darkness. He seemed to be calling her attention to a game of croquet in progress under the beeches, whose spreading lower branches were dusted in silver from the light of two lanterns. Lucy turned to look; then she and Dillon strolled towards the croquet-ground, and Taliaferro's mind again opened to the relation of McBeath's complaints.

The players were all elderly men, who, in shirt-sleeves, with handkerchiefs about their necks and expressions of laborious concern on their grizzled faces, pursued the game with feverish intensity. Now and again one of them stumbled over a wicket, or rushed into the darkness after his ball, or held a lantern while

his partner executed some subtle stroke. Often a clatter of disagreement arose, and the heated utterance, mingling with the sharp rattle of the mallets, sounded above the music in-doors and the hollow clang of footsteps on the porch.

"I suppose your uncle has gone?" said Lucy, in a peaceable interval of the game.

"Yes," answered Dillon; and he added, simply, "I miss him."

Lucy regarded him for an instant, thinking how worn he looked in the lantern rays. "We have promised to keep your spirits up," she smiled, finally. "And yet when I consider how we are going to do this, I begin to think we spoke without reckoning much upon ways and means. We haven't a great deal of anything except scenery. And since you have been in Switzerland our knobs may not mean very much to you. There is the cascade, of course, and Rock City, a place of local celebrity two miles away. Besides these things I am afraid there is nothing. You've already been to Mill Springs, you know."

Mrs. Morrow just now appeared in the twilight region between the silvered beeches and the surrounding circle of outer darkness, calling, "Have you my fan, Lucy? I am breathless, quite breathless with the heat in-doors. What is that? Mill Springs? I suppose Lucy

is telling you of the pretty places hereabouts? Dear child, she is so fond of Streamlet! And yet Lucy has seen considerable of the world. She visits in the Blue Grass, you know, and she spent last summer at White Sulphur. I suppose she has told you about Rock City? Lucy, we must take Mr. Dillon to see Rock City. To-morrow is Sunday. Should you like to walk out with us to-morrow afternoon? Very well, then. And oh, by-the-bye, Mr. Dillon, it would be very kind in you to ask Alexa to dance with you to-night. Poor Alexa! She is looking so sweet, and she is almost at the point of tears because she is longing to dance and yet can't make up her mind to 'mix in,' as she says."

They went to the house together, and Dillon, in accordance with Mrs. Morrow's suggestion, stopped to speak to Alexa. She was sitting among the hill folk, trying to find in this position a consolation for the more active pleasures which she desired. Her face had a purplish flush, and her foot patted the floor as she watched the dancers. When Dillon paused before her and made his plea, a light broke from her discontented eyes, and she rose, smiling with open pleasure. Alexa danced surprisingly well, and Dillon, taking her back at length to the hill folk's corner, made some flattering

comment, which gave her a pang of joyous satisfaction.

"How good of you to pay Alexa that little attention," murmured Mrs. Morrow to the young man as he leaned over her chair.

The Major cleared his throat, remarking, in his formal fashion: "Not altogether a sacrificial proceeding; Alexa is grown to be a fine girl." He added, "If you are quite ready, my dear, perhaps we had better go."

Dillon in accompanying the Morrows through the crowded office, where unknown faces thickened and unfamiliar voices rang in a waxing clamor, was aware of something like a sense of unaccountable intimacy with the Major's family. In the general strangeness of things his acquaintance with Lucy and her mother had become a matter of relatively long standing; the Major's military back was already a matter of which Dillon's eye took note with an habituated glance; Mrs. Morrow's plump, tilted chin, and Lucy's brown-and-gray eyes, abstracted and serene, affected him in an oddly accustomed way.

"You're not going to forget about tomorrow?" inquired Dillon, as Mrs. Morrow's skirts fluttered down the hotel steps.

"Of course we shall not," Lucy assured him, looking back. Behind her a single young

maple, struck with a tongue of lamplight, rose in the purple gloom like a feather of white. The steps, too, shone whitely in the spreading beams of the doorway, and Lucy, descending them, seemed as if vanishing into the bloom and wonder of a visionary world. The rising wind swept her voice away indeterminately, and Dillon, standing by himself, watching the moon roll its amber wheel above the craggy height beyond, had a feeling of illusion. Something vital seemed to him to be stirring again in his being. "It's the air," he said, smiling with a little contempt. "But I don't care much what it is so it gives me a kind of hope that there may really be a to-morrow for me."



"YOU'RE NOT GOING TO FORGET ABOUT TO-MORROW ? "

VI

THERE was a Sabbath calm upon the valley. All the mill saws were silent; the rivers, low in their beds, tracked the bottoms with a milky trail; the store porches were empty, the station platform occupied by only a lounger or two of so thoroughly established habits as Halifax Burns, muttering in his wild, white beard, and setting a drunken stare upon those who fared by on their way to church.

The bell was ringing in a coercive, business-like way, as if it realized the importance of its function. The preacher had already gone down the hill road, and other moving figures dotted the rocky slope at intervals and scattered the fennel-fringed ways of the village.

Lucy, coming along the cliff's brow with a hymn-book in her hand, noticed the dry, powdery effect of the smoke whiffing from a cottage roof on the sphinx knoll's slope. Two women advanced in the little garden-path before it, stiff in Sabbath prints; they shut the

small gate with a perfunctory sort of moderation, as if the rigor of the day affected their movements. On the South Fork certain shadows, black as pitch, spread themselves thickly. The Cumberland's broad, sunny reach leaped along shore in a dazzle of delicate green as the leafage of the farther bank stirred with a little wind. In the deep dead water at the meeting of the rivers a small boat skimmed along slowly; it resembled a darkly colored fish with the effect of silvery fins, lent it by the oarsman's white shirt-sleeve and the reflection of this in the stilled currents. Through the grasses at Lucy's feet a yellow butterfly rioted in a reckless, devil-may-care way, as if determined upon seizing its hour. And as Lucy laughed to herself over the profligate intimations of the little creature wastefully winnowing its floury wings in the June herbage, Taliaferro rode over the railway on his roan mare.

"Well," he said, drawing up, "I've a ten miles' ride in prospect. Yes; one of the Currey boys has broken his leg. Worse luck! I was going to walk with you all this afternoon. Now I can't."

"But you'll have a chance to try your new splinter," Lucy reminded him. "I thought you were anxious to see how it works?"

"Oh, I am!" muttered the doctor; "but

another day would have done. Why any sane being should elect to break his leg on Sunday morning—”

“What an unreasonable person you are! As for walking with us—why, you’ve seen Rock City any number of times.”

“Oh, of course I’ve seen it—as far as that goes.”

“And you’ve never seemed to care much about it. I remember being surprised, when we were last there, that you should be so indifferent to the view. It’s really lovely, you know; but you hardly noticed it.”

Taliaferro drew a quick breath. There on the hill’s brow she stood in her broad white hat, holding the hymn-book in her hands, regarding him with a look in which mild surprise and accusation were blended. “You have no æsthetic perception, you know,” she seemed to be reminding him—“really none in the world.”

“Lucy,” said Taliaferro, a little huskily, “I don’t think I am altogether indifferent to the beauty of things. But there are times in a man’s life when scenery doesn’t quite seem to round the sum of existence. When his whole mind is engrossed—” He began to falter.

Lucy had her widening eyes upon him, and suddenly, with an air of enlightenment, she

cried out: "How dull I am! Do forgive me for forgetting how you are occupied with work and study and important things. I ought to be ashamed—and I am—to expect a man of affairs to— But you forgive me, don't you?" She looked past him, adding: "Why, the bell has stopped ringing! I am late." And with a word of hasty farewell she went on down the road.

Dillon, who was reading a day-old newspaper under the beeches, saw her figure hurrying along, and a momentary feeling of regret came upon him in remembering that he had definitely declined, a moment before, Alexa's invitation to attend the morning service.

"You better come on," Alexa had said; "we got a splendid preacher. And you're so fond of music you'd like to hear the school-master's wife play the organ. We give her a dollar a Sunday. She's *great*. I'd like to be as strong in the wrists as her. Better come on!"

But Dillon had not risen from his tilted chair, though he tempered his refusal with a few words of a nature as light and bantering as Alexa's coquettish manner seemed to demand. Certainly Alexa's dark eyes were beautiful. It was rather a pity, Dillon idly felt, that she should be always filtering their deep rays through demurely lowered lashes. They were

infinitely impressive — those sombre eyes of Alexa's—when, in a forgetful moment, she let the transcendent repose of vacuity engulf them.

Such moments were, however, not common to Alexa except in the retirement of the family-room ; and Dillon, finding her always gay and often wearisome by reason of these arch humors, was not particularly pleased when, upon coming down-stairs towards the middle of the afternoon, he perceived her on the porch, curled and beribboned, and with an expectant restlessness of gaze under her hat. Alexa substantiated his fears by rising and saying, “ Maybe we just as well walk on up and meet them.” And as Dillon silently nibbled at his mustache she added, “ Mrs. Morrow said we better walk up and meet them in case we were ready first.”

“ Very well,” Dillon said, resigning himself to this arrangement. But as he paced along with Alexa he cropped with his stick the heads from all the grasses by the road. Presently Mrs. Morrow and Lucy came in sight, and as Mrs. Morrow pushed ahead with Alexa in some discussion of ferneries, Dillon found himself in Lucy's company, and recovered his temper.

The way led behind the hotel in a deeply shaded road which went in a broad curve about the high knoll where the village burying-ground massed its wood crosses and picket-fences and

sparse firs. Beyond this were groves of young trees and thickets of ragged brush, growing all at haphazard, and interspersed with many shaling blocks of limestone which, in their slanting grayness, resembled forgotten tombs, written over in mournful lichens and based in topping weeds. About the grassy headlands green hills rolled softly, scalloping the farther sky in dim purples. Near by a gray old hut or so sped a clapboarded roof from the uncertain path, and the sharp angularities of a snake-fence, dusted in the lower bars with the light gold of wild madder, zigzagged the blurring mixture of flawless skies and fresh fields.

Continually the footway, creeping among the loose stones, rose and narrowed, sprinkled everywhere with horsemint in hop-like violet balls, and with Solomon's-seal in soft amberish tufts. A faint wind drifted eastward ; the summer sky seemed nearer ; a sound of water rose, and just ahead, cleanly parapeting the unflecked blueness, a gathering of great rocks struck along the view, mossed with green and gray, thickly shaded, set in straight rows with an architectural sort of precision, like ancient blocks of masonry allotted in streets and cross-streets.

This world-old town of some elemental chance had its thready paths padded in cush-

iony layers of brown autumnal leaf. Through the dim, mysterious ways the faint highland winds breathed sad and strange, and over everything the changing branches of many forest trees wavered, setting pale shadows afoot in the silent avenues and lending to the woodland stillness the sorrowful lisping of their topmost leaves. A little aside from the spectral paths of the thronging rocks a great solitary block leaned from the perpendicular, poised itself airily on the edge of the bluff. A step or two, with a foot-cloth of starry moss, incised the stony pile, and, mounting these, Lucy pointed out far below at the base of the high cliff the green waters of the Cumberland.

“We’re a mile or so above the head of navigation,” she said, while from beneath the moan of the shoals came in a lamentable sound. From cliff to cliff the rocky bed had whipped the thin glaze of emerald into feathery rings, which covered the whole stream with their evanescent whiteness. At the bend of the current a rude fish-trap jutted from the water, and over it, careening in slow, ominous flights, a huge buzzard flashed red gleams from its dingy wings.

Lucy was adjusting a pair of field-glasses to the distant summits, and Mrs. Morrow’s voice sounded from some leafy solitude beyond the

path, where, in damp, lurking places, she searched for ferns. "Alexa," she called, "here is a clump of maiden-hair. You can carry several roots in a handkerchief if you think your mother needs a few more plants." Alexa sprang from the tilting rock to join her, and Dillon, who had doubled himself up near the verge, felt the enchantment of the place enhanced by her departure.

The inherent melancholy of his nature luxuriated in the lonely murmurs of the water, the notes of a distant bird, and the sighing of the summer trees—sounds which seemed in subtle harmony with the aged ashen hue of the rocks, the sinuous purple of the hills, and the dreary glitter of the river far beyond the shoals. Lucy laid down the glasses, drawing a long breath, which reached Dillon remotely.

"How lonely it is!" she said. "Half its beauty is in that. Oh, look, he has pounced on a fish! Poor little thing!"—as the buzzard descended on the trap and rose weighted with a slim, silvery, flapping thing which beaded the air below it with crystal drops. Dillon took up the glasses.

"I have a bitter sense of personal grievance," he said. "I suppose he was born to be eaten—that catfish. But he's such a little fellow, and the buzzard did the thing so fero-

ciously, that somehow one resents the business. There! the brute has reached the bosom of his family. Can you see him lighting on the crag to the left? No, no—this way, near where that oak sapling springs from a crack in the cliff." He laughed as he looked at the tree over the buzzard's eyrie. "A beautiful simile, though somewhat overdone, of the effect of charity upon the stony bosom of the reprobate! A cleft, a seed, then the full-leafed tree! I wonder how many million times that metaphor has figured in pious discourses? It's a sister to the simile of the jagged rock which falls into a stream and threatens to stop its course forever, till the current, doubling about it, pursues its way with added force, and clothes the stone in such verdure that the mean obstacle becomes its greatest beauty." There was a mocking tone in his voice, and as he spoke he tore up a scrap of moss and cast abroad the crumpled fibres with a careless hand. "Most of the world's poetic enthusiasm concerns the unregenerate soul," he smiled, "from 'Paradise Lost' to the 'Idylls of the King.' Where would literature be if it were not for the fall of man? It wouldn't be at all, probably. Since we are being taught that it's a kind of disease anyway—a morbid secretion—its category is likely that of the other ills which the

credulous first pair brought on us. Do I read much? Oh yes, a man's got to read. The literary habit is like the opium habit; a man knows that he's in an impossible world floating in an ether which doesn't pretend to touch actual ground, but once he's begun to lend himself to these fictions it isn't easy to leave off."

"You don't read the right sort of books, perhaps," said Lucy, reasonably.

"What should I read?"

She laughed. "You can get an edifying list almost anywhere. I shouldn't like to commit myself. But before we started out this afternoon I was reading a story—oh, it was only a story—of Bret Harte's. I don't know whether it is edifying or not, but I know it was interesting. There are a number of Western stories in the book; it isn't a new book at all. I liked them because they are hopeful stories, and show how, deep down in the hearts of criminals, gamblers, and outcasts generally there are indestructible germs of good. Nothing, I think, is so surprisingly pleasant as to watch these kindly impulses creeping out in bad lives, and making men who haven't been good men willing to sacrifice themselves in some poor creature's behalf, or to suffer all sorts of hardships in order to give a child pleasure."

"It would be surprisingly pleasant to see them, as well as to read about them. But even to read about them must be encouraging. Will you lend me your book? I should like to be encouraged and cheered up—" He said this lightly, but Lucy saw that his face was grave. Won by the seriousness with which she listened, Dillon spoke of his lonely childhood, his mother's death, and his uncle's indulgent love. There was little in his life, he said, which he cared to dwell on. His youth had led to a manhood without hope or ambition. "But," he cried, interrupting the broken narrative, "I shouldn't ramble on like this! Idle regrets are rather poor stuff to ask one's friends to listen to."

"Are your regrets idle?" asked Lucy, trying to banish the impression of some dreaming impotence of character in him which, as he talked, had been stealing into her mind. Perhaps it was his voice, saddening and lapsing from time to time, that had occasioned this idea. Lucy had not time to hunt down her fugitive perception, and she reproached herself for having entertained it.

"I wish I could believe that they were anything else," said Dillon.

"'He that lacks time to mourn,'" quoted Lucy, snapping the lid of the leather case in

which she had replaced the field-glasses, “‘lacks time to mend.’” And she added, with a practical air, “But it’s probably better not to spend a great deal of time in being sorry about what can’t be undone. It is more important, perhaps, to do something worth being glad about.”

“If one can,” put in Dillon.

“If one can?” repeated Lucy, in smiling wonder. Dillon’s lips trembled in their slight wisp of yellowish beard. How implicitly she believed in the radical goodness of every human heart and the invincible power of every human will! How amused she looked that he should question these things! How clear her gaze was, how blessedly fallacious her young wisdom!

Alexa’s voice rose close by in one of the streets of the tenantless town. There was the rustle of footsteps in the dry leaves, and then a silence.

“How long you have been, Alexa!” said Lucy, turning; and as she turned she grew white and uttered a little stifled cry and fell back. Dillon, following her glance, rose suddenly with a suppressed word. In the middle of the shadowy space behind them Alexa was standing perfectly still, as if in a stupor of fear, with ashen cheeks and wide eyes and an

outstretched, motionless hand ; and in the brown leaves before her Dillon and Lucy saw the glimmer of something that was like a jewelled ribbon, slender and bright, but coiling in a suggestion of deadly life.

VII

IN the dimness of growing night the outlook from the hotel had an impalpable delicacy. Overhead a thought of blue still lingered, though a few stars, mere flecks of uncertain silver, shook vague and far in the darkening skies. A haze of dusty yellow settled momentarily behind the steep black cliffs ; and as it sank the stars brightened and multiplied, and half-way down the hill road a drug-store window flung a sudden crimson through the gloom which wrapped the town.

About the station were the usual evening sounds : the clack of the telegraph instruments, talk, laughter, the shuffling of feet, the creak of the signal as a distant whistle blew, and finally the noise of a freight-train puffing up the swag, and fanning out upon the tracks great white triangles from its electric headlight. This moving, milky radiance reached clean to the hotel porch, casting a strange pallor over the men who sat there, and

passing swiftly on to twist fantastic, glittering scarfs through the big beech boles beyond.

“Something new, ain’t it?” asked a voice. There was an affirmation which was almost lost in the triumphant outburst of a party of men engaged at cards within the office.

“You weren’t persuaded to join the game?” asked Taliaferro of Dillon, with whom he sat apart from the others.

“Hardly,” signified Dillon, loosening the ash from his cigar; “not when the game is cinch.”

As he spoke a stalwart figure bunched its outlines in the doorway, sending a conically hatted shadow over the porch. It was Bohun, and he peered through the shadows, saying, “‘s Mr. Dillon about?” Bohun had his pipe in his mouth, but he did not seem to be smoking, and the light from the window picked out a rather uncommon expression in such parts of his face as his broad beard left free.

“Why, say,” he began, approaching Dillon’s corner of the piazza, “I just now heard about what you done this afternoon. Alexy and Mis’ Bohun they’re so weepy you can skercely git any sense outn ’em. Took me some time to find out that they had theirselves worked up over your killin’ a copperhead out yender in the rocks. Seems it was a-coilin’ to strike when you hit it a lick. Alexy sticks to it that

she'd be a goner by now if you hadn't been so quick on your feet. She says the way the copper oozed from the thing's mouth was a sight to raise a body's flesh! Lord, I just says to 'em both, says I, 'Nobody has any business projectin' round these knobs without a flask! If there's any time,' says I, 'when a monthful of good rye 'll out-marshall prayers fifty cents to a brass nickle it's when a snake sticks ye! 'Twon't do to depend on a angel comin' down special,' says I; 'the force may be off duty or detailed som'ers else. You want liquor and you want it quick.' I tell y'all, that close call of Alexy's has made me kind of creepy. Fools gyrls is! starin' at the sky and walkin' straight into bottomless pits! Lord, I tell ye!" He dashed the damp from his brow rather excitedly.

"Oh, the thing was not very near her," exclaimed Dillon. "He was probably more scared than 'she, poor little reptile! He was beautifully streaked and spotted."

Mr. Bohun nodded twice. "The good looks of a sarpint 'll never turn my head," he specified. "And ugly or pretty, I ain't forgettin' that you cracked his backbone. No, sir, I am not. We've only got the one, Mis' Bohun and me. We'd be plumb destracted if anything was to happen Alexy."

Dillon rose, stretching his arms. "It was only a worm, Bohun," he repeated. "I hated to kill him. I haven't the usual prejudice against his kind. Doctor, are you going down the hill? I should like you to give me some sulphonal or something. I sleep wretchedly."

Taliaferro had developed a very friendly sentiment for Dillon during the evenings which they spent together about the hotel. Dillon's comments upon them gave new color to the familiar sights and sounds of the commonplace life of the town, and, though he spoke of everything with a sort of bottomless cynicism, there was always in his voice a sympathetic quality which won upon the doctor. Taliaferro, having a singularly straightforward habit of mind, was accustomed to judge men in a large, general way, by their prominent characteristics; in Dillon's case characteristics of a contradictory nature seemed equally prominent, and Taliaferro's efforts to establish a logical opinion regarding the other were somewhat perplexing.

They walked down the dark hill road and sat talking in the little hemlock office until a countryman, with his arm in a sling, came to claim the doctor's attention. Dillon, returning alone to the hotel, found two or three men still on the porch, while from the little-used parlor

above the office the sounds of an exceedingly flat piano floated in a strain appropriate to the day. On his way through the upper hall Dillon had often glanced into the hotel parlor. Sometimes a country bride sat blushing in the broken sofa-arm, regarding with blissful glances a heavy-handed, equally embarrassed young man, who, at the rumor of a footstep in the hall, usually began to pound out a tuneless refrain on the aged piano. Generally, however, the room was empty, yet with an air of by-gone social hours in the threadbare paths of gray which wandered through the Brussels carpet and spread in pools before the rickety arm-chairs and uncertain settee. There was a large stove, with an apoplectic purple lustre on its sheet-iron front, which also suggested a possibility of past fires, though now the pipe was gone, and only a black, soot-dabbled hole in the once gilt-papered wall remained to show where it had been. Over the high picture of some Kentucky statesman with an aquiline profile and a stock-bandaged neck the evergreen branches of a long-forgotten holiday stretched bare brown twigs, in which silky strands of web hung and the remains of flies wound in white cocoons. Skeletons of what had been mistle-toe-boughs lifted a russet furze about the chandelier, which had still one glass globe left to

show how splendid it had been in the days when the piano before the long windows was new, with a case less scratched up than at present, and without the present strange disposition of its yellow keys to stand erect, like the tusks of an irate boar.

The great sliding-doors were always open, and to-night as Dillon passed the parlor he saw Alexa sitting on the toppling piano-stool, running her hands along the keys. At his step she turned and got up rather quickly. She was for once not in the least gay, as he observed, but with a paleness in her cheeks that made them look almost hollow, and with a grave shadow in her eyes that befitted their darkness and heavy brows.

"I never told you—I never thanked you—this afternoon, you know," she stammered. "I was so scared I couldn't. But I've thought lots about it since, and yet seems as if I don't know just what to say. Where would I be now but for you?" She lifted her head slowly, tragically. "Where would I be now?"

Dillon burst into a laugh. He laid hold of a chair, and was about to seat himself when Alexa, in a deep voice, said, solemnly, "Not that. The back legs always stretch out and give way when any one sits in it."

Dillon, avoiding this disaster, took the piano-

stool. "If you mention this thing to me again," he smiled, "I shall have to go and board down in the flats with the loggers. I'm not sure it wouldn't be a good idea, anyway. Two dollars and ten cents a week is what Mrs. Meakin asks. A fellow could lay something by for that grisly phantom of a rainy day to which prudent people are always sacrificing their fine weather."

"I'd pity any one had to eat after Mis' Meakin," remarked Alexa, easily turned from herself. "She makes the meanest light bread I ever put to my mouth."

"Of course I'd be miserable," admitted Dillon, pulling out his mustache. There was a whimsical gleam in his eyes, and the lines of his face looked vague. "But, then, one is usually miserable in this badly adjusted world. A little poor pie-crust, more or less—what does it matter?"

"It makes a heap of difference when you got to digest it," said Alexa. "But, say! why, I won't speak of—of that other matter if you don't like me to. Only," she gave a half-sob of fearful remembrance, "I want you should know that I'm grateful."

Dillon twirled the crazy piano-stool in rising. Alexa's profound eyes were lifted to him in a gaze of mournful intensity, and as he took her hand in a pressure of farewell, he said, gently,

“Don’t be grateful, Alexa. That is my own privilege, if indeed I have been able to serve you in any way.” Bowing over her cold, brown fingers with a kind of half-mocking courtesy, he brushed them lightly with his mustache, and resigned them and went on to his room.

“I always said Mr. Dillon ’d be heaps of company for you, Elex,” said Mrs. Bohun, one evening later on. “I don’t reckon Beau Mc-Beath ’ll ever hear the drum beat—eh, Elex? Beau’s good-hearted. I ain’t lisping a word agin him; your paw sets store by Beau, secin’ he’s a Mason and all. Your paw ’lows it looks well to be a Mason. Seems that they all brother each other along like, and have to believe in a God, and know how to write their own names. So ’t when a man’s a Mason, why, you know he’s pious and high eddicated, and sure of a boost when he needs a boost. Your paw says that for himse’f he don’t ask no boost off of nobody. He says he’d scorn for to wear a three-cornered charm unto his watch-chain and have to go ’long the street winkin’ and blinkin’ at every stranger he met, a-trying to find out who was feller-Masons and who wasn’t. You know they got a way of shaking hands that tells ’em who’s who—take up one finger and drop two, or some such thing. No, your paw can hoe his own row, but he says he don’t blame Beau for git-

tin' ahead any honest way he can. D'law, hear me taking up for Bean, like he had any chance these days!"

Alexa blushed. "Ma," she expostulated, "how you go on! Just because Mr. Dillon gets me to play him college glees now and again."

Mrs. Bohun's conciliatory smile became infused with penetration. "I can see through a ladder when the rungs ain't too close together," she pointed out. "All is, Elex, I hope you won't marry no one that 'll carry you out of Pulaski County. One reason I always said I could enjure it if you and Doctor Taliaferro fixed things up was account of him seeming to feel settled here."

Alexa gave a cry of exasperation. "The doctor? Ma, you kill me! Why, he don't know there's another gyrl living besides Lucy Morrow."

Mrs. Bohun was not disconcerted at this. "That's all right," she announced. "You're a might sight handsomer than Lucy Morrow. As fur as him seeming taken with her goes, you never know, Elex, what a man's turning in his head. Men are deep-witted creatures, Elex. I wouldn't wonder if doctor was battin' his eyes towards Lucy Morrow just to hide his real feelin's for some one else," triumphantly

pursued Mrs. Bohun, who read the books which the drummers bought on trains and left behind at the hotel.

“Fiddlestrings!” said Alexa, who read no books and had an unimpaired rationality.

“I know a thing or two, Elex. Mebby you’ll ask me to believe Mr. Dillon’s eyes are walling uphill too?”

Alexa’s brow clouded. “Well, he goes to the Morrows pretty frequent,” she insisted.

“He’s got to put in his time,” Mrs. Bohun explained. “You ain’t always about, Elex. If you was, he’d wear out no shoe-leather climbing the upper road.”

The trees had thickened with the fulness of July, and the village lay submerged in a sea of leaf, revealing only in infrequent glimpses a cottage chimney and slanting roof ragged in branching shadows. The rivers cringed before the midsummer drouth. Their currents now were little more than jelly-like films of olive spread upon the stony beds. In the richness of its overhanging foliage the waters of the South Fork seemed along shore to ooze with green paint; and relieved against the deepening tones of earth and sky the shoals resembled a low white net stretched from bank to bank.

One night as Dillon came out-doors after

supper he paused in an inspection of the rosy west, upon which, as upon a spread fan of gauze, every smallest sprig of the trees along the bluff was lacquered in dense black. The windows of the station repeated the faint vermillion. Its overhanging roof laced the red sky with the row of bias beams below its eaves, and behind it a whirl of smoke rose from the pile of brush which a throng of boys were burning there. As Dillon stood on the hotel threshold nightfall darkened, and a light or two crept out in the bottoms, and a half-moon thrust a bunch of silver splinters through the lacy gloom of the beeches. He caught, from somewhere in the valley, the snapping of a banjo. Presently the thud of feet reached him and the ring of a voice bawling forth the changes of a rustic cotillon.

“A dance,” said Dillon. There was no one about the porch or office except a young man with a Jewish face, who was unpacking an iron-ribbed trunk under the water-cooler and spreading upon a long table a stock of tapes and notions. But as Dillon turned an eye upon this person’s operations Alexa appeared in the door of the family-room, a maze of frills.

“Alone?” said she.

“Persecuting time with hope,” remarked Dillon, who had the habit of adapting other

people's phrases to his own necessities. "What is that man stringing out those braids and buttons for?"

"He's a drummer," said Alexa. "When he gets his things spread out he'll go and fetch up a store-keeper to see them. They all show their stocks in our office. The music's begun, hasn't it? There's a dance to-night down at Buck Sherrer's. I thought some of going down to look on. Doctor Taliaferro's going to bring Miss Morrow down, he said. I told ma if Lucy Morrow could look on, it wouldn't hurt me to look on."

Taliaferro was, in point of fact, at that moment calling Lucy's attention to the broken strains drifting over the cliff. They were sitting on the lawn, over which a belated breath of wind began to stir, the Major immovable in his arm-chair, Corinne sleeping in her mother's lap, Lucy on a bench below the trees, a slightly defined figure whose skirts the moonlight whitened, and whose head was garlanded in leafy shadows.

"Won't you go down?" asked Taliaferro.

"Isn't it rather warm?" demurred Lucy. "I've been to Somerset to-day, and I'm a little tired." Then, as she caught the sudden disappointment in his face, she added: "Sherrer's is only half-way down the hill, after all. Wait

till I get a scarf or something." She returned in a moment with a fleecy knit thing on her arm, and they went down the pebbled walk. In the outer road she laid her hand confidentially on his arm and asked, "Have you something to tell me?"

Taliaferro's pulse quickened. They had come to a clump of trees growing darkly midway of the road, and as they passed through the dusk spot he could feel Lucy drawing nearer to him, in a sort of apprehension of something in the gloom.

"Yes," he said, "I have." His heart had lifted with her motion of reliance in him, and when they came again into the moon-lighted path, and he saw her face attentively raised to him, a sudden impulse sprang into being in his mind. "Yes," he repeated, "I want to tell you something."

"If it's anything important," said Lucy, beginning to cough with the smoke of the burning brush behind the station, "you'd better wait till we're coming back. This smoke is dreadful; and those boys will certainly catch fire, leaping as they are through the flames."

At the turn of the platform Buck Sherrer's house, with an illuminator behind the oil lamp on its porch, flashed in sight. A stone dyke along the cottage front kept the road from

coming into Buck Sherrer's yard, which was only a foot wide, and filled at present with the legs of such villagers as had secured seats along the stony fence. The twang of banjos filled the air, and from the low-ceiled front room, with its throng of bouncing figures, a pounding of booted feet came steadily. The men, big fellows in rough attire, with oily black heads that came dangerously near the beams, appeared to abandon themselves gayly to the figures of the quadrille. The women had a more serious aspect, advancing and retreating with smileless lips and austere eyes. They looked on, cold and critical, while a girl with slim, stiff ankles executed a brisk but joyless jig before her partner. There was a shout of laughter from the men as this girl, corseted to a wooden rigor, cast her pink gingham arms behind her and eluded the outspread hands of the sawyer's assistant, who had expected to "swing" her in some change of the dance.

"Got the go-by that time, Higgins!" they shouted. "Serve him right, Marcella! serve him right!"

Lucy and Taliaferro, on the slope of the hill across the way, joined in the laughter; for the sawyer's assistant enjoyed the name of being irresistible.

In the door of a neighboring house Halifax

Burns sat with his head on his breast, and from the broken fence-rail his wife, a peaked and witch-like figure, observed the crowd.

"Doctor," she called, making out Taliaferro's face, "my man's mighty porely to-night! And me, I ain't no way well, neither. Couldn't you give us a few of them little brown pills? I never git no rest withouten 'em no more."

"You can't live on those pills, Mrs. Burns."

Mrs. Burns's face sank. "Law," she whimpered, "I ain't deserved no such fate as this, raised like I was, a prayin' mother and all! She warned me how't 'd be. But marry Burns I would and did, and I 'ain't knowed the name of peace for thirty years. Drinkin' and carousin' it's been, year in and out! Lord, if I could git one of them little pills to—"

"Oh, get her some," whispered Lucy. "How can you be so hard on her? Go, please go. Your office is only a step away. I'll wait for you. Here are Alexa and Mr. Dillon. I will talk with them."

As Taliaferro emerged from the office with a little vial in his hand he could see, above him in the hill road, the flaring lights of the Sherrer cottage, the throng of heads, the sheet of moonlight beyond on the slope, and Lucy standing where he had left her. There were others about her, but Taliaferro did not see the oth-

ers. A strange exaltation was upon him. The night was glorified with uncommon loveliness, and the stars, shining high and far in the pale heavens, spun and pulsed with power and promise. Somewhere across the South Fork an owl uttered a plaintive, puppy-like wail. A bat whisked past him, pencilling the air with swift black. On the drawn curtain of a way-side dwelling a woman's figure modelled itself in faint gray as she bent to caress the child upon her bosom.

Taliaferro's eyes misted hotly. Lucy's voice drifted to him, and as he drew nearer to her he could see how the rising breeze was lifting the heavy light hair about her face. She was talking with Dillon, and she did not appear aware of Taliaferro's approach. He came so near, indeed, unperceived of the two, that the expression of both unconscious faces was plainly disclosed to him, Dillon's fixed and serious and questioning, Lucy's a little moved, a little strange.

Taliaferro drew up with a sense as of thin steel in his side. "God," he thought, "if it should be he!"

VIII

As he went up the road with Taliaferro and Lucy and one or two others, Dillon was not aware of any change in Alexa's manner. He knew that she was somewhere behind ; he supposed she was pleasing herself in the matter of an escort. At the brow of the hill his companions left him, and as Alexa just then came in sight Dillon opened the hotel gate for her and sauntered beside her up the path.

Alexa made no effort at conversation. Her face was moody, and she appeared careless of the twigs and grasses catching at her skirts. Once, as she stumbled, Dillon caught at her arm ; but though Alexa, recovering herself, moved away from him pettishly, he was quite insensible of any shadow of anger in her, being filled with rapt thoughts in which Alexa had no part. Yet when they came into the lighted office and he saw her discomposed face, a sort of compunction thrilled him in remembering that he had left her quite alone on the hill-

side, while he fell into that brief but somehow pregnant little talk with Lucy. He was about to ask the girl to pardon his neglect; but Alexa, without a word or a pause, crossed the room and slammed the door behind her.

The matter disappeared with her from Dillon's mind. Active affairs claimed his attention upon the following day, for Dunbar found it necessary to send him into the South Fork country upon some mission connected with inspecting and branding a quantity of timber that was ready to be put afloat with the first water. For a week Dillon and an old logger belonging to the mill spent their days on horseback in a wilderness of trackless wood and their nights under the trees or in some mountaineer's hut, with the stars shining on them through the chinky roof. And as he lay awake, listening to the hooting of the owls and the murmur of the river flowing sluggishly in its deep banks hard by, no vagary of Alexa's disturbed Dillon's visions of a gentler face. He pondered upon his first dulness to Lucy's charm, reflecting with wonder that his fancy should have been so unimpressionable; and remembering, too, how little beyond a passive peace he had expected to find in the valley hamlet which was teaching him so much. For he began to doubt if, after all, he had already drunk life to

the full. It seemed now as if no vital cup had ever touched his lips ; and in the freshness of his emotions he longed for the rolling knobs, the lowland fields, the meeting rivers, the great beeches, and the lofty headlands where rose the modest roofs of the hill folk, and where, hedged in late and early roses, a pebbled path climbed to the door of Lucy's dwelling.

When finally the inspecting and branding were finished and he and his companion addressed themselves homeward, he found himself boyishly overcome in the prospect. The shrilling of the saws and the whiffing of a stave-bucker reached him from a distance in an oddly satisfying strain, and there was even a kind of melody in the snorting and fussing of the little locomotive which belonged to the valley branch.

It was on for dusk as he closed his room door, after his arrangements for supper and the visit which he had it in mind to make during the evening. The halls were still unlighted, but a soft twilight grayness, falling through the parlor doors, enabled him to see a little way ahead. A touch of yellow from the primrose afterglow tinged this luminous outburst, and as Dillon in passing the parlor glanced towards the wide, shining windows at the dying gold of the west, he saw darkly lined against one of

them a woman's figure, poised in an attitude of gloomy thought—a figure which, as his step shortened, turned with a startled air.

"It's only I," Dillon said, recognizing Alexa. And as she continued to look at him in a strange, disbelieving sort of way, he came towards her, repeating his assurance. Alexa murmured a word or two, with her eyes still fastened upon his embrowned face.

"Is anything wrong?" questioned Dillon, beginning to be surprised at her muteness and pallor.

Alexa suddenly covered her face. "No," she breathed.

"I thought you seemed rather down," explained Dillon.

"It's nothing," repeated Alexa, in a stifled way. "I hate it here, that's all. I hate it."

"Hate it? Why, it's a beautiful place. Now I—why, I'm fonder of it than of any other place in the world. I was never so anxious to get back anywhere in my life." Alexa uncovered her eyes, and Dillon noted their depths and the purple light that faded on Alexa's hair. "I know," he went on, "that you haven't many interests. But you might have more, Alexa. Preaching from me has rather a queer sound, but I can't help thinking you might be happier yourself if you were to try to make

some one else happy. Mr. McBeath, now. If—”

He left off, startled at the change in Alexa's face.

“Him,” she breathed, making a little motion as if she groped in the shadows for some sensible support. “Do you dare . . . do you dare . . .” Her voice broke in a rush of tears.

“You poor child!” cried Dillon, with a dawning comprehension. He had drawn closer, and he lifted Alexa's quivering chin and half smilingly questioned the brimming eyes she tried to cover.

“Tears?” he asked. Her throat fluttered with an imprisoned sob. Dillon bent lower. There was a shrill accent from the piano as he did so, and suddenly drawing away he realized that it was because he had given the keys a stroke of his elbow in resting his lips for a pitying instant upon Alexa's wet eyes.

“Oh, I've been so miserable!” sighed Alexa. Her hand was on his sleeve, and she stroked the stuff as if the very twill of it gave her comfort. “But you're home now! And you were truly glad to get back?—you were truly *homesick*?” A delighted, tearful laugh broke from her. “Sure 'nough homesick? I've fixed your room right pretty since you been gone. Did you notice the splasher? I worked it myself. Ma



“ ‘OH, I’VE BEEN SO MISERABLE !’ ”

and I put up the curtains, too. Did you notice how well they hang ? And the rocking-chair—we thought you might care to rock awhile evenings. Oh, it was such a comfort to feel I was *doing* something for you ! I was miserable because I had acted kind of pouty that night down at Buck Sherrer's. I was hurt because you left me so long by myself—I'm *such* a fool ! And then when you went up South Fork without saying good-bye, I just thought I'd lose my mind fearing you might be took for a revenue officer and killed. Oh, I've been punished for my hatefulness ! But it's all right, isn't it ? You called me—Alexa—just now. It's all right, isn't it ?”

Dillon evaded her clinging hand. “All right ? Of course, child. There's never been anything wrong.”

“How sweet and forgiving you are!” cried Alexa, as Dillon, suddenly turning, strode across the room.

“What an unspeakably foolish thing to do !” muttered Dillon. And as he went to his old seat on the porch a perpetually recurring sense of dissatisfaction continued to oppress him. He tried to shake it off, to enjoy the evening quietude and regain the feeling of content which had been his so little earlier in the day. But countless annoyances seemed to pervade

the atmosphere: an exasperating chorus of insect noises filled the beeches, frogs were dolefully croaking, a dog barked at maddingly exact intervals, and somewhere across the porch a man was relating in tones of loud discontent a grievance against the village blacksmith.

“Shoed me the worst job I ever see! And when I says to ‘m, ‘This mare’s huffs ain’t right, Josh,’ blame if he didn’t face me down! Yes, sir. And me born, y’ might say, with a bridle in my hand. No, sir; I got no more use for Josh. I wouldn’t kerry him a gourd of water if he lay there in the ditch with his tongue hanging out the len’th of my arm! That’s how I am.”

Dillon got up, knocking his chair aside in a fever of nervous irritation. Out in the dark side-yard he strolled back and forth and watched the switch-light glance along the tracks, plunging arrows of scarlet into the dark bosom of the night. The town was lost in shadows, and as he paused and looked down upon the hollow, its pervasive gloom appeared a sort of visible expression of his own feelings.

“No,” he said to himself, sharply, “I can’t go up there now!” And as Lucy’s face, in its soft grace of girlishness, crossed his mental vision, he groaned and dropped his head. Yet, presently, leaning there against the black beech trunk, he began to question himself as to the

color of his offence. After all, what was it—this thing that tormented him so in the remembrance? Nothing more than a little impulse of sympathetic kindness, such a compunctionous caress as one might give to a child whom one has unwittingly hurt. "I am straining at gnats," he muttered. "Heavens and earth! is there to be no pretty courtesy in this world? Must a man go his way in perfectly stolid unconcern, looking neither to the left nor right for fear his dangerous smile shall set off the easy tinder of some school-girl's heart? Have I grown up in lilyed cloisters that I should begin to have painful scruples because I have tossed a kiss to a village girl?" And as he cast his head backward in a little sound of amused disgust with himself, it came upon him that, in point of actual fact, his remorseful qualms were a highly encouraging indication of some very radical difference in him. They showed what seemed to be a change in his attitude towards life. A moral or spiritual fineness which he had long believed lost forever was developing itself, fresh and sensitive, under the dropping, dry remnants of his old self. That was it.

Things, after all, were not so bad. Perhaps they were better, even, than he could precisely comprehend. He would stroll up the hill,

he decided, not to stop at the house with the coppice of roses, not to see Lucy or hold any converse with her, but simply to see the roof that sheltered her slant darkly against the starry stretch of upland sky, and catch a breath of the flowers she tended, and perhaps to glimpse the light in her window, the flutter of the thin curtains behind which she combed out her long, shining hair. He climbed the road behind the station and passed the hill folk's houses. The rush of the river doubling under the railway bridge rose in stronger murmurs, and far out behind the dwellings on the bluff a whippoor-will uttered its gurgling call. Then a scent of heavy roses wandered through the dew-weighted darkness, and the pickets of the Morrows' fence struck white upon the road-side shadows. Some one, it appeared, was standing at the gate. As Dillon advanced he saw that it was Lucy; while behind her in the vine-covered porch was a pleasant sound of voices and a soft glow of cheerful light.

“You are back, then?” said Lucy, holding out her hand.

She opened the gate; and as she did this Dillon hesitated. “I don't think I was coming in to-night.”

She seemed a little surprised. “Oh,” she murmured, “I thought—”

"I wasn't coming in," said Dillon, slowly. "I happened to get to thinking over some unpleasant things to-night, and it didn't seem to me as if I would be justified in dragging my shadows through your rose-garden. But somehow those shadows don't appear to be so ponderous as they were a moment ago. I should like to come in, if you'll let me. And to have a flower, too." His voice rang out gayly over its little undertone of sadness. Lucy laughed as she broke off a green, thorny stem in the hedge; but her laugh also held a note of some emotion that was not gayety.

IX

WITH the advance of August hazes which had all summer kept their distance, crouching at the feet of the farther knobs, began stealthily to approach the village, winding veils of deep blue about the hills and blurring the foliage in a rich obscurity. From the valley of the South Fork a cloud as of blown indigo seemed to hang in suspension. Trees lost their greenness in it, and only the highest tufts of leaf retained an emerald tone. The rivers were at low ebb; business was consequently dull, though a hope of early fall "tides" began to enliven the loggers' conversation, and a story of a recent rain "up yender at New River" was going the rounds of the flats.

"Summer's on its last legs," announced Mrs. Bohun, observing the date of the newspaper she was reading. "D' know's I care much. Though having fires makes work. Good thing I never took down any of the stoves! They're where they belong, waiting to

be started up when needed. Of course, they're some rusted and the pipes is mostly choked up; but as sure as I was to have 'em cleaned there'd be warm weather till New Year. Best let things jog along. Paw, I see the paper states they're prospectin' for ile over in Wayne. Well, well! it looks like folks is naturally possessed to wear themse'ves out hunting something to work with. I 'ain't not a mite of patience with such doings."

"A party of strangers went over in the Monticello coach Wednesday was a week," said Bohun. "I understood they was smellin' round for ile. They'll likely stop here comin' back, overnight anyway, for to get the train north. Mebby you might as well name it to Sa' Jane to put some water round in the pitchers and a towel apiece in the rooms. They was high-tone lookin' fellers, and I'd like 'em to brag up the house."

A night or so afterwards, as Taliaferro came in, tired and dusty with a ten miles' ride, he saw in the office an unusual gathering of well-dressed men. The oil prospecting in Wayne occurred to him in a kind of unification with his sense of something familiar in the air of a young man who stood leaning over the register, and, advancing a little, he said, "Graves, is this you?" At which the other wheeled

round with an exclamation and seized him in a hearty grasp.

"Is it me? Well, rather! Been asking about you every five minutes since supper. They said you'd gone to Dick's Jumps—Jove! —to Dick's Jumps to see an old lady who had been 'took suddint.' I've been over in Wayne with these fellows you see around. Looking up oil, you know. Say, Nat, you're not looking up to the mark. Climate? Overwork? No? What are you doing down here, anyhow? How about Paris, and Berlin, and transatlantic clinics, and no man being old enough to practise medicine till he's thirty odd, eh? You haven't lost your ambition, have you? or your money? No; I thought not. You weren't that style. Now, me—but I'm a model for the youth of the land these days. Marriage is a wonderfully settling thing. And there's the baby, you know. A man feels different when he has a little family. By-the-way, Nat, how's the pretty Miss Morrow, who visited at Colonel Desha's two summers ago? Ah-ha! lives here, eh? M-m, I begin to see. Let's get outside, where we can smoke and recall old times when we were school-boys down in Woodford. I've got a tear in my eye, Nat. I was always a sentimental cuss."

As they put their feet on the rail of the

porch's beech - facing end Graves pursued : "Say, Nat, how is this thing, anyhow ? Congratulations in order ?"

"I'll tell you in time," laughed Taliaferro, rather constrainedly. "At present, John, I want to hear about the boy. I suppose he's a good one ? Smart, eh ?"

"Smart ?" Graves's keen young face expanded. He entered upon a lavish history of the boy's six months of brilliant progress through an appreciative world, only pausing an hour later when the hotel gate banged to noisily and footsteps sounded on the hotel steps. Taliaferro, glancing round, saw that it was Dillon, with his face set in an expression of abstraction and serenity. Without doubt he had come from the Morrows'. Indeed, he was always now at the Morrows' of evenings, so it seemed to Taliaferro, or, in these days of slack work, rowing Lucy and Corinne upon the river, or looking up rare ferns for Mrs. Morrow.

Taliaferro had come to understand very clearly how matters addressed themselves. Slowly, after that first instant of anguished apprehension, he had grown aware that his own part, so far as regarded the dominating emotion of life, was with the baffled many. Watching his hopes blown frustrate, the young man had hours of mental sickness and depression ; but as weeks

passed and he schooled himself to accept his cup of hemlock in the spirit of a man, a kind of fortitude came to him. He told himself that, as between himself and Dillon, it was not strange at all that Lucy should choose as she seemed to be choosing. Dillon, with his mournful charm, his gentle ways, his confidences, his illogical bitterness, which appeared to mask an infinite tenderness for all poor souls in stress—Dillon appealed strongly to Taliaferro himself; that he should appeal also to Lucy was only in the nature of things. The dead level of life did not look particularly promising to Taliaferro, having caught a glimpse of dream-empurpled peaks, but he stayed himself with the resolution to tread the flat ways in a sturdy spirit, without the meanness of envy or the futility of regret.

Yet for all these intentions of fairness and friendliness towards Dillon the doctor had a pang at the sight of the tranquil joyousness which shone in the young man's eyes as he crossed the porch. Dillon himself seemed not at all aware of the figures in the shadowy porch end; he stepped into the office, absent and smiling a little. A door shut, and his vanishing step rang from the bare staircase.

Graves settled back in his chair. The ashes from his cigar dropped unheeded on his knee.

"So he's down here, is he?" he said, in a musing tone. "I believe I had heard that he was sequestering himself far from the madding crowd." And he added, after a moment in which he recalled himself to his cigar, "The hound looked quite at peace with himself."

Taliaferro's eyes narrowed. "That's a devilish strong term to fling at a fellow, John; you must have a pretty heavy grievance—"

"Grievance? Me? None in the world. The only sentiment I have for Dillon is the plain, simple sentiment of reprobation which a man who is passably honest may naturally feel for a man who isn't. Dillon—J. Burkely Dillon, you know—hasn't been fine in his discriminations regarding the use of capital—other people's capital. He's used money that wasn't his. In short, but for his uncle's influence, personal and financial, our young friend would be wearing the monotonous garb common to such as tamper with the laws of the land and get found out. No, I don't consider that I was far wrong when I called him what I did."

It had grown very still. Only the top twigs of the beeches, moving in the damp night air, gave off a faint, foreboding sound, while with a stroke as of light, warning fingers a drop or two of rain fell sharply on the vines.

"You see," resumed Graves, a little uneasy at Taliaferro's silence, which seemed as if grounded in some incredulity, "I was in a position to know about this matter. My wife was a Jonas, you remember. And as her father makes his home with us I got my information pretty straight. The old man was completely broken up when he found how Dillon had let him in. Dillon was secretary with the Jonas Lumber Company—secretary or something on a very confidential scale, in consideration of his uncle's interest in the firm. He had every chance for doing the Jonases, and he did them. He wasn't very clever about it. I don't suppose you care to know what his method was? I don't believe I could make it clear, anyhow; but it was a system which in moderation might have been successful for a long time. Dillon, however, isn't moderate in anything. He plunged. And the bottom fell out of the profits with such startling force that the firm began to investigate. They found out very soon where the trouble was. They'd never dreamed of it's being Dillon—so deferential to age, so modest and mild, and such a favorite withal among the gilded youth! The Jonases were crushed. And as for Dillon—well, his capacity for despair is about the deepest capacity he has. It amounts to a genius.

The way he— Say, Nat, am I making this thing wearisome? You're not asleep, eh?"

"Asleep? No, no, I'm not asleep. Go on."

"Oh, that's about all. Old Burkely straightened the balance. There was a lot to pay, and it crippled him considerably, I understand. Jove, if ever a man should have suffered the reward of his sins it was Dillon! No poor devil, mind you, tempted to borrow funds for a sure-to-succeed scheme. No chap with pressing debts, an extravagant family, or any of the excuses common in these cases. But just a fellow belonging to the common herd of profligates, requiring for a loose life more money than he could lawfully command. That's all. No speculations. No hopes of paying the 'loan' back. Nothing but a desire of keeping up somehow, anyhow, his end of the rope. Oh, they uncovered some rare Daphnic bits in Dillon's young career, I can assure you! Gad, it makes me sore to think how the whole thing was hushed up—glossed over! Every one pledged to silence, you know, and a general regret that Mr. Dillon's health should require him to give up business for a time."

Taliaferro drew a breath, and Graves added: "Of course, my telling you all this doesn't count. I've always told you everything, haven't I? Seeing him around brought it out rather

unexpectedly." He yawned. "Half-past eleven. Maybe we better turn in. See here, Nat, you're keeping up a kind of aggressive silence, aren't you? It can't be that you and Dillon have vamped up any sort of friendship, can it, that makes you find what I've said particularly uncomfortable, eh? His doings are nothing to you, are they? You're not mixed up with them in any way?"

Taliaferro had risen too, but there was an unsteadiness in his movement, and his rugged features looked gray and shaken. "No," he said, thrusting back his rough, thick hair in a confused sort of way, "I'm not mixed up with him that I know of—at least, not in any way it would be easy to—to explain."

X

IT was two weeks or more since Dillon, upon his return from the South Fork expedition, had stopped in the hotel parlor for that little talk with Alexa which had afterwards rendered him so compunctionous. He had quickly decided, indeed, that there was something quite creditable and encouraging in the impulse to which he had yielded upon this occasion, yet the conclusion that it would be advisable to avoid Alexa as much as might be in the future was forced on him by his remembrance of the girl's tears and confession. He had based his ideas of her upon the air of overture, the smiles and gleams and bridlings and flutterings with which Alexa first manifested herself to his consciousness ; but since the moment in which she had clung to his arm half sobbing, surrendering herself to that artless narrative of her sufferings in his absence, her small cares for his comfort, her anxieties and self-reproaches and final relief that now all was "right" between them, Dillon had

not been so sure that Alexa was so slight and soulless a creature as he had imagined.

He hoped that she would refer his consoling caress to the category of general humaneness. When he saw her again, however, a day or so later, it was instantly plain to him that Alexa had taken the matter in the broadest possible way, without reasoning about it at all, or seeking to run it down to the exact emotional source from which it might be derivable. She thought simply that he had comforted her through an instinct of tenderness. Dillon had feared that this would be her interpretation ; and when he observed that she regarded him with believing eyes in which an unmistakable happiness brooded, he realized the justice of his forebodings.

Nor was it so easy to avoid her in their narrow life. He managed it with infinite difficulty ; and in the times which ensued he effectually proved to himself the futility of his resources. For it appeared that whenever reason and resolution enabled him for a while to elude Alexa, or to use her with coldness and unconcern, such occasions were sure to be followed with hours of pitying remorse, when, by being particularly kind to the girl, he undid the salutary effects of his wiser attitude. He hated beyond all things the sight of suffering ; and when

Alexa, meeting him about the house, fixed her great, expectant eyes upon him in a shrinking, questioning way, he found it less and less easy to pass her with only a chill word of greeting. At such times her face whitened so suddenly, her lips trembled so piteously, that he usually turned back with a bantering phrase or a light caress, so as to bring life to her looks again and prevent himself from remembering her in an aspect of sorrow and reproach.

One morning in the end of August, as he crossed the little passage between the stairway and the office, Alexa opened the door of the family-room, and, at seeing him, feigned a poor surprise. "Oh!" she said, "I didn't know it was you."

Dillon halted, a little annoyed at the prospect of a delay, for he was on his way to the Mornings', having arranged to row Luey and her mother and the little sister as far as the cascade which, a short way below the juncture of the rivers, hangs the cliffs of the Cumberland in a hoary beard of spray.

"Were you wanting to see me about anything?" he asked, looking at his watch.

"Oh, it's nothing," faltered Alexa, in a changed voice. "I just thought if it was you I'd tell you that book of war-songs I sent for has come. The music looks right catchy; I

could play some of the pieces for you to-night if you wanted me to."

"Thank you. I shall probably have letters to write to-night." With his hand on the office door he added: "I shall have to go, I'm afraid. Good-bye."

Alexa made a trembling little forward step. "Good-bye," she said, faintly. "There's a thread on your coat. Wait! here it is."

Dillon regarded the bit of lint. He saw that the fingers which held it were unsteady and that Alexa's face was quivering. And seeing these things he laid his hand reassuringly upon her black braids, saying, "After all, Alexa, I think I may get my writing done before night. There! you are like yourself again, bright and smiling."

Outside it was clear and bright, with an autumnal crispness in the air that comported with the autumnal scarlet tufting the side of the sphinx knob and flaming from the ledgy brow where the general's signals had burned years before. Leafage everywhere was thinning, though in only a slight way, which as yet scarcely permitted the church and half-dozen houses of a neighboring hamlet on a hill across the river to disclose their outlines more definitely than in midsummer. Somewhere up about the railway trestle they were blasting

rock, and the booming echoes crashed back on every side from the hollow slopes. Below, through the rich greenness of the valley, the red church spire thrust itself like a stained dagger, and around it the dense leaves, moving slightly, seemed to shudder as if from a wounding impact. Straggling scraps of yellow corn-field patched the lush lands here and there, and among them a little gleam of water winced in the sun. Nothing stirred in the lower roads, but up the hill a herd of dun cattle were pushing four or five abreast, and the long horns of the foremost ranks, arching against the heaving mass, resembled a low flight of gulls on a ground of deep red. Along the tracks, too, Lete Haight was trailing her sleazy cottons, dragging by his fat, reluctant hand her yellow-haired child. The baby kept up a lusty roar of displeasure as his mother pulled him on, and tears and molasses mingled in a streaked glaze on his ruddy cheeks.

"Poor, poor creature," breathed Mrs. Morrow, regarding the vacant, shameless, child-like face, as she and Lucy came round the station. "It does seem as if we ought to do something for her. Oh, good-morning, Mr. Dillon. We expected to meet you at the mill chute. Now we can all go down together."

Up towards the boom-float men were work-

ing with long pike-poles, loosening the imprisoned drift and a few staves and ties which had come down the stream in some scant rise. Thick spume heaved along shore, and the sides of Dillon's skiff were painted yellow with the cheesy froth. Dull purple flowers sweetened the air. The herbage gave off a dry, nutty savor, and the searching smell of wet wood and damp sawdust mixed with the odors of flowers and grass.

The man who had succeeded Bohun in the management of the boom-house paddled by in a dugout, lifting his hairy face and calling "Howdy, all!" to the party embarking at the mill chute. "Mighty heavy pullin' through the dead water yender," he warned Dillon, as the young man set the oars and laid the boat about. Dillon's straw hat was pushed back, leaving an untanned strip of forehead visible below the rim. His eyes were clear and bright, and Lucy noticed how well he looked burned to a healthy brown and with strength in his long, skilful stroke.

The skiff shot from the branch into the wider stream, the banks of which were ribbed with last-year logs and thatched with culls and strips of black wane. In a moment the village had slipped from sight behind a sudden bend in the shore, and only a magenta end of the

mill roof, peeping curiously out, remained to mark its site. The turn of the current brought too a sharp clash of water to the ear, and a stroke or so more developed to the left a wooded steep which seemed to reach into the far blueness of the morning sky. Over the precipice a crystal sheet, fretted into flashing bubbles and tossing foam, broke from the fern-hung maw of a cave below the brow of the bluff. Great twisted trees grew about the pool into which the cataract splashed some little way above the river level ; and around them, and indeed everywhere along the path in the craggy rise, were mossy rocks and broomy sedges and tall ferns and gadding brambles and a marigold waste of fall flowers, wide petaled and abundant, while from the noisy lips of the cave delicate fronds of maidenhair waved their black-threaded lengths, misted in a whirl of shining spray.

Dillon moored the boat, and they began to climb the jagged path which led along a mill stream deflecting from the pool, and up around the mill itself, an aged structure, rumbling to the movements of a huge overshot-wheel. Lucy and Corinne went ahead, and Dillon, as he helped Mrs. Morrow through the brambles and stones, was more distinctly aware of the blue flutter of Lucy's skirts in the low green-

ness before him than of Mrs. Morrow's panting but enthusiastic comments upon the beauty of the scene.

"How soothing the sound of falling water is!" gasped Mrs. Morrow, with breathless rapture in her sentimental profile. They had reached the basin of rock which spreads its green circle below the mouth of the cave, and as they came in range of the yawning hole in the bluff a breath of cold air rushed sharp and sudden upon them, bursting from the cavern with the thick and as yet unbroken outflow of the underground stream. "And this delicious coolness!" cried Mrs. Morrow. "Do let me sit where I can enjoy it. Corinne, dear, there are some pretty stones. Suppose you build a little house here beside mother. And Lucy, while I rest, you might take Mr. Dillon to the spring. I should like some water, if you find a gourd there, or anything to drink out of."

The spring was not far away, a tinkle of cool silver ledged in limestone in a solitude of oak saplings and ferns. All around it the ground wore a moist richness of sward; and when Dillon, after they had tasted the water and speculated upon its probable mineral constituents, threw himself into a comfortably reclining position upon the grass, Lucy said, "Aren't you

afraid of taking cold? It looks very damp." She herself was sitting in a hollow of a rock, whose gray sides arched above her like a shrine. Her blue cotton dress, dull but definite in its color, hung below her feet in straight folds, while directly across her face a shaft of sunlight, making way between the trees, fell in a strange effect of illumination, gilding the stone arch overhead and falling in a mild lustre upon the herbage at the rock's base. Behind her deepened a narrow sky, speared with a dark tuft or so of brush and the slender spire of a single birch, white and virginal in its isolation. "Really," she repeated, "it isn't safe to sit on this moist ground."

Dillon, looking up at her, had been lost in a thought of a strait Judean landscape, darkly blue and green, and ringed with faint gold above a lifted face. At the simple commonplace of her words he started, with a sense of remote pain. How passionless her voice was! How impersonal her solicitude!

"I don't know that it makes much difference to me whether it's safe or not!" he flung out, in a petulant accent, plucking a few filaments of crimson silk from the spiny hold of a thistle growing hard by him. "Of course, a cold in the head isn't pleasant or romantic exactly. But I've no doubt that properly neglected it

has served to end more than one fellow's vain bout with fate."

Lucy was smiling as she asked, "Do you want yours to end?"

Dillon deliberated for a moment. Lucy's cheerful expression put him out a little, and presently, in an almost bitter way, he said, "What have I to live for?"

Lucy began to feel the weight of his mood and the obligation of removing his gloom. "Haven't you as much as others have?" she asked, "more, even, than most people?"

"Me? More?"

"Yes. You are young and well. You have friends—"

"Friends!" he burst out. "Friends! Oh, Lucy, do you suppose any number of friends—even if I had them—would mean anything to me now? That the good-will of the universe could give me a moment's satisfaction, unless you—" He left off brokenly. "This defiled hand of mine, Lucy," in a little while he said, recovering his voice, "dare I ask you to take it? You, in whom mercy and truth meet so graciously? Lucy, Lucy, there is not a thought of mine that isn't vested in you! But my life is in ruins. I am clothed in ashes. That is why, though I love you so much, I hardly dare ask you to lift me up and shine

upon my darkness and save me. Yet I do ask it, my love, my hope ! I ask it, in spite of my unworthiness, because you are so dear to me !”

He had drawn close to the hollow rock in which she sat listening mutely, and he leaned upon the ledge beside her, white-lipped, with all the blue gone from his eyes in the widening of the pupils. In speaking to her he had used expressions commoner in prayer than in a plea of love, such phrases as are natural when men entreat mercy and salvation from God. If Lucy felt this at all, the perception reached her in an aura of flattering persuasion, and she caught her breath and looked away.

“Darling,” breathed Dillon, “will you cast off this poor, unstable soul ? It rests in you for redemption, Lucy.”

At this Lucy seemed to him to tremble and to grow very white. “Oh,” she faltered, “am I so much to you as that ? . . . so much ? . . . then . . .” She did not finish this sentence in any actual words ; but she leaned forward with a touching little gesture and laid her hand across his questioning eyes, so that he might not see the color which she felt rising to her face.

XI

UPON hearing Graves's disclosure regarding Dillon, Taliaferro's first feeling was one of bitter indignation that a man whose life had been conformable with propensities of so questionable a kind should have been for a whole summer in almost daily association with Lucy. The doctor's kindly sentiment towards Dillon suffered a complete change. He had been like an ineloquent priest, who in a day of solemn festival sees the rites of a beloved and familiar altar administered by hands ordained to higher service than his own, but who, since his gods are honored, is not without comfort, though he may not choose but be heavy-hearted at having no share in the pouring of the oil and the lighting of the tapers. Now he felt simply like one who views his shrines in a desecrating hand, and the angry vigor of his impulse to immediate action almost startled him.

All night long as Taliaferro dwelt upon the

matter his conclusions pivoted forever round to the same unalterable point : that the Morrows must know what manner of man sat above their salt. Taliaferro could not decide to what extent Lucy would suffer in the knowledge ; but he said to himself that whatever her pain in it might be, it was necessary that Dillon's defections should be made plain to her. Dillon had wrought dishonor ; he was of those in whose way are destruction and misery ; yet as the sky yellowed for dawn and the morning-star failed in a bank of primrose, Taliaferro, bitter in his estimate of Dillon's actions, found himself suddenly remembering that it is not inconsistent with the plan of our common nature for men to have good and bad in them. The bad was, of course, particularly obvious just now in Dillon ; but the doctor could not say that active principles of virtue might not lurk in the young man's character, strong in their possibilities of growth. While it did not seem to Taliaferro that active potentiality of any sort inhered in Dillon, he admitted that Dillon had gentle attributes, and that nothing in him suggested the reprobate mind or calloused conscience. It seemed, too, that having a capacity for remorse, Dillon's moral sensibilities must still be fine, though Taliaferro felt a natural doubt as to whether Dillon's overwhelming

penitence might not have been infinitely delayed but for the incident of the discovery of Dillon's dishonesty. The emotional disturbance of a man whose sin has been found out cannot always be relied upon to indicate a total reversion of moral sentiment. Shame is not remorse; nor, considered Taliaferro, in view of Dillon's mildness, does it follow that a person who avoids treading on a worm may not be capable of doing despite to his brother.

Taliaferro felt his ground equally uncertain when, sitting on the side of his bed and recalling Dillon's personal traits, he made an effort in as unprejudiced a spirit as he could command to adduce from them a testimony upon the essential quality of the man. For by this time it began to seem to the doctor that if Dillon was really changed and had sufficient energy of temperament to hold a clean and upright walk henceforward through life, any one who should stop his progress by casting upon him mud from the mire of his past might be doing an extremely reprehensible thing. Dillon's eyes with their peculiar nervous characteristics, Dillon's long hands with their slender uncertainty, recurred to Taliaferro in a way that for the instant was subtly corroborative of his own ideas regarding the young man's fallible nature; but with a qualm of repulsion the doc-

tor thrust aside the impression. Whatever truth might lie in the science which undertakes to formulate the physical signs diagnostic of the irreclaimable delinquent, Taliaferro felt that this was as yet invested with too many inaccuracies to justify its use. There was something in the tribunal of the flesh which appeared to him to a large degree arbitrary. But in foregoing resource to it he asked himself if Dillon, in concealing a certain episode from the Morrow family, had not been a little more culpable than was consistent with any improved standard of honor in him.

For it seemed as if deception had been practised. Taliaferro knew too well Major Morrow's simple, severe ideas to be able to conceive that the old soldier would readily admit in familiar friendship a man blemished after Dillon's fashion. The doctor veered, therefore, to his earlier belief, that the Morrows must not remain longer in ignorance. And thus deciding, Taliaferro felt himself shrinking from the burden of the bitter and thankless task which seemed upon him. By the general suffrage of humanity the tale-bearer is held to be rather more worthy of contumely than the wrong-doer upon whom he informs, and moral reprobation is always considerably easier to bear than contempt. Lucy, without doubt, would

despise him, Taliaferro knew. Sitting by himself under the beeches that night, worn with conflicting ideas, he called up her image and figured the disdaining poise of her fair head, the curl of her smooth lips, as she would glance upon him when she understood that it was he who had carried this shameful story.

He dropped his rough head and groaned. It was passing towards dusk ; the sun had his chin on the hills, and, stretching lazily out a rosy finger or two, laid them warmly upon the cold cheek of the shaded earth beneath the beeches. The color lingered there for a moment ; then the red faded, and the grass was less green with its vanishing. A man in a long coat and flat hat was coming up the hotel path. He looked towards the solitary figure under the trees, and came nearer, and said, "Good-evening, doctor. Will I disturb you if I sit down with you a moment ?"

Taliaferro made room on the bench, apologizing for the abstraction which had made him deaf to the preacher's approach. The preacher gazed dreamily upon the shadowy valley. He had taken off his hat, and the gray hair on his neck stirred a little in the air.

"I was on my way to speak with Mrs. Bohun," he said. "But seeing you here made me feel as if I should like to rest for a few

minutes. I believe I am tired." He sighed, and finished by saying, "I have come from a house of mourning—no, doctor, it is no patient of yours who is dead. He who has gone home was only an outcast. Probably death's seal on his childish lips is the kindest touch ever laid there. I speak of the poor little one whose mother is the wretched woman living under the trestle. He died of neglect as much as of any serious disorder, I imagine. It was only by chance that I heard of it. I found the mother alone with her dead, sitting on the door-step, and looking up and down the road with apparent unconcern."

Taliaferro exclaimed, "How well off he is to be out of it all, with such a weight of heredity and such surroundings!"

"So the woman said—at least, she signified as much by remarking, 'I ain't grievin' none. He's took from trouble.'" The preacher passed a hand over his eyes. He was the same man who, in another Kentucky town, ugly and outworn where Streamlet was beautiful and rich in promise, had on a certain morning stood beside the sorrowful figure of old Bob Valley and read the burial service of the girl whose early death left her father so desolate. "I have been very remiss," he resumed. "I have not striven as I should to waken this poor girl to

a sense of her condition. I have often spoken with her, indeed, but I have let myself be disheartened by the stolid wonder, the heavy apathy which I encountered in her. Now," he pressed on—"now I must try to make up for my lukewarmness. I must see if we cannot set her in ways of honest service. That was my mission here this evening—to consult Mrs. Bohun upon the chances of work and a home for this woman. We are indeed slack servants of our Master if we do not strive with such as are a reproach among us and dead in sin."

Taliaferro was sunk in silent deliberation. Presently he asked, "Do you believe, then, that all sin and suffering and shame and wretchedness are removable from the world, and that it is our duty to try to remove them?" The preacher looked surprised.

"Of what use is the lesson of Christ's ministry," he propounded, with an accent of reproach, "if we who walk after him do not also comfort the sorrowing, visit the imprisoned, and labor with the perverse?"

"I don't think I meant to question the uses of kindness and mercy and charity," said Taliaferro. "But I have just been wondering if perhaps a man's first duty may not imply right living in a passive way rather than in a perpetual running after those who seem to have

a natural instinct for miring themselves in the world's mud. Isn't it enough to render men their dues and attend to one's own affairs? Or, after all, is it nobler to risk the entanglements and stains that come of occupying ourselves with the sins and moral sicknesses of others? Sometimes I have almost believed that what concerns others is eternal, and that one would be presumptuous to interfere, even with the best intentions."

The preacher looked aghast, and inquired, "Is all life to be sunk in egoism, and unselfishness and sacrifice and philanthropy to be wiped out?"

Taliaferro said, gently, "Is egoism less natural and honorable than altruism? Or is unselfishness not, in real truth, at the base of many evils? Often, lately, when I read that crime is increasing steadily everywhere, it has seemed plain to me that unwise benevolence is at the source of the growth of many of these social wrongs. I think we are suffering from our philanthropy—from our weak, mistakenly kind way of dealing with crime."

"We can't very well relapse into barbarism, doctor."

"No. It mightn't be bad if we could, in certain directions. Sin and the penalty of sin among savages have an immediate relation, you

know. Now that we have grown in culture, and the simple law of like for like offends our sensibilities, the malefactor feels pardonably secure. He knows that justice suffers long and is kind ; that if the worst happens, prisons are very comfortable places ; and that even if he is ungovernable and vicious under restraint, no prison official will dare to punish him with any severity, for fear the whole world should rise up in a wail of horror. The worst so seldom happens, however, that, as a recent statistician has pointed out, the profession of a criminal offers greater profits and fewer risks than any other career open to the indolent poor. Humanitarianism has something of this to answer for. It has taught us so to falter and palter over the disturber of our peace, so to weigh his health, sanity, grievances, genealogy, and motives, that his sin gets overlooked. The greatest good to the wrong-doer is apparently what we are tenderly and piously considering, and how far we can make the way of the transgressor agreeable and safe. That is why I say that philanthropic motives may be productive of endless social demoralization."

"Well," hesitated the preacher, "charity must guide us—the charity that hopeth all things. If the seed we cast forth with prayer springs up in thistles, it is not for us to dwell

on. The wheat must some time reveal itself. We must continue to use all men with mercy."

"Yes," said Taliaferro; "only it seems as if we are rather merciless to good men when we encourage those that prey upon them. But upright men have got to get along the best way they can. Virtues, somehow, always seem a little ridiculous as connected with manhood. A fellow's got to have considerable stamina nowadays to venture to live an unblushingly decent life. He is apt to be laughed at, you know, while the erring are wept over. One would rather be wept over than laughed at."

"You are no longer serious," smiled the preacher.

"I am serious in saying that we weep too much over the erring."

"No!" said the other, "no! no! It is right for us to seat him at our hearth and succor him in his weakness, and make him a partaker in our walk with God. Purification is possible even with such as are mistakenly called wholly abandoned, and how much more with those who have only stepped a little aside!"

"I don't like to seem to disagree with you on this point, Mr. McVeigh. Of course it's the difference between the religious and the ethical point of view. I was going to remind you of its having been said that the influence

of men in whom vice has not yet entirely destroyed all good qualities is infinitely more harmful to the public well-being than the example of the wholly depraved ; just as infectious diseases are more likely to be communicated while in progress than after reaching their height. I think it is Macaulay who has mentioned this ; an out-of-style authority, perhaps, but one in whom I am unprogressive enough to find unbounded stimulation and pleasure."

"Oh, from the ground of a figure of speech—"

"But *isn't* sin a disease—a rank disorder of the social organism ? Why don't we treat it as a disease, then ? Certainly it doesn't appear to us kind to nourish the plague in our bosoms. It doesn't appear to us that our healthfulness is such as to allow us to mingle unharmed with lepers. Men yield swiftly, irresistibly to disease, but any return to health is uphill work, slow and laborious. A germ of fever can infect a whole nation. Moral disease is just as potent, perhaps ; why shouldn't it be feared and segregated, then, instead of touched and fondled ?"

"It is our mission to cure it," signified the preacher.

"And our nature to catch it," smiled Talia-

ferro, rising and brushing back his hair. "I see that I can't persuade you."

"No, yon haven't persuaded me. And I imagine that in an actual case you wouldn't carry into practice your harsh views, doctor! You can't make me believe that you wouldn't do as much as any one to help a poor sin-stricken fellow to get well again. You wouldn't be at all afraid, in pure fact, of taking any ill from him. Nor would you hesitate about it any more than you would hesitate to go among the dwellers of a pest-house."

"Doctors are exempt from contagion," said the other, grimly. "But if I saw at large an individual who manifestly ought to be in such a house as you mention, I think I should be justified in warning people that they had better avoid him."

It had grown very dark, and a scattering of stars shone in the sky, over which, too, the Milky Way unrolled a beamy strip. Bats were whipping through the dusk. Owlets were crying. From the hotel office voices echoed, and as Taliaferro came slowly up the porch steps a man, whose feet were comfortably planted against one of the pillars, stopped him with a gruffly cordial exclamation.

"Where have you kept yourself lately, doc? Anything wrong? Lost a patient, eh? Here,

sit down by me a while. I want to talk with you.” Dunbar laid his hand on Taliaferro’s arm as he spoke, and pointed out a chair. “What’s up, eh?”

Overhead the uncertain keys of the parlor piano were beginning to emit a complaining resonance. A voice essayed a note or two, failed, and resumed :

“We shall meet, but we shall miss him,
There will be a vacant chair,
We shall linger to caress him,
When we breathe our evening prayer.”

At this point Dillon appeared in the door of the office, a slight, modish figure, with a flower in the satin lapel of his short coat. He paused, and a sort of frown marred the composure of his good-looking face as the strains of the ballad reached his ears. Almost at once, however, the air of displeasure left him, and, tossing a word of greeting to the men by the porch post, he ran down the steps.

Darkness at once blotted out the alert shape ; but Taliaferro’s eyes did not withdraw themselves from the gloom of the pathway ; and Dunbar, noting the fixed gaze, uttered a little growl of invective.

“Nat,” he came out, presently, “we’re good friends, eh?”

“If we aren’t—”

“Well, I just wanted to say this : Dillon and Mrs. Morrow and Lucy were at the cascade this afternoon. I saw them coming back, and—and—now of course I’m an old mustache! It’s been some time since I saw Pan in every goat-track. But it seemed to me as if the young man looked rather assured, and all that. Nat”—he lowered his voice—“you’re not giving up ?”

“Giving up ? My renunciations are almost too passive to be described in that way. Nor do they belong to the present. It’s been some time since—”

Dunbar let his chair legs down with a crash. “Good heavens, Nat ! — you don’t tell me coolly—you don’t sit there—and—”

“Well, what could I do ? She’d never thought of me at all. That was the sum of it.”

“Sum of it ?” Dunbar struck his knee. “Why didn’t you *make* her think of you ? What—why—where was your tongue—eh ? eh ? Don’t you know you’ve sat blandly by and let this fellow—huh ! He’s lacked no blarney, I promise you ! He hasn’t got a smack of the old sod in him for nothing ! Oh, I’m sick ! I’m sick ! Maybe I oughtn’t to say it, but I don’t believe much in Dillon. He’s got a crooked

streak in him, I'm afraid. He won't make that girl happy. He's burned candles at too many shrines. It's only a fancy with him, contiguity, and a lack of interests. Maybe you don't know that he's been as wild as a hawk?"

"Oh yes, I do," said Taliaferro.

"Yet you had no conscience about leaving Lucy to his wiles? Poor, little Lucy! as sweet and credulous a girl—"

"See here!" cried Taliaferro, desperately, "I know all about him. I know that he's been worse than merely reckless. He's been—I'm going to tell you what he's been. Maybe you'll know what to do about it—I don't." And briefly, in a sentence, he went over the matter of Dillon's dishonor. "That is all. He may be far removed from the chance of such departures. I've ceased speculating upon it. I only know one thing: that if Lucy were my sister, instead of—of the woman I've loved so long, I should feel that she must not—at least, in ignorance—marry such a man."

Dunbar had a stunned air, and he came to himself with a resounding word.

"So you've been doubtful about your duty in this matter? You've speculated upon it, eh? Well, thank God, I am a sane man! I've got no delicate qualms and scruples! I shall take it on myself to tell Major Morrow a thing or

two. I'd go up there right off if I didn't have to make the night train. Yes, I'm going North for a few days. But just as soon as I get back I shall make it my business ; and while I'm in Cincinnati I'll make a few inquiries concerning this young gentleman, whose fits of gentle melancholy have seemed so unaccountable. Burkeley ought not to have kept me in the dark. But it wasn't an easy thing to tell. Poor, old man ! Eh ? Shall I ask Dillon to resign his position at the mill ? No, I think not. I won't keep him from honest work, and I shall not spread abroad any tale of his delinquencies. But when it comes to doing what I can to keep him from marrying a friend's daughter—gad ! that's another thing !”

XII

THERE was the usual noontide clatter of dishes in the hotel kitchen. The Monticello coach had gone down the hill road, the North-bound morning train was crossing the bridge, the signal stood closed, and loungers were dispersing on the station platform.

In the back yard of the hotel a white cow wandered, nibbling at the shoots along the slope. The solitary hog, rubbing his nose against a bar of the pen, uttered an off-and-on sound of pensive discontent. Occasionally a dry leaf coursed through the seeding grass, foretelling fall, though the tall red and white hollyhocks outside the family-room windows still flaunted gay rosettes, one of which now and then tilted to the murmurous descent of a bee. Against the pale, thick stalks was a low bench, and extended upon it in the shade of the rough leaves, Alexa lay at length, with skirts that spread wing-like on each side.

Alexa's hair, tightly wound in a black strand,

trailed down and lost itself in the little pungent, wart-centred blossoms of dog-fennel growing thickly about. Her eyes were shut, and the metallic-looking lashes laid an added darkness on the brown cheeks. Across her brows a white towel was bound evenly, like an Eastern head-dress, with fringed ends outlining the slim neck. She lay quietly listening to a murmur of voices in the family-room, taking note presently of a suggestion of farewell in these mingling and confused accents. Then a door closed ; silence fell ; and a moment later Mrs. Bohun came to the kitchen threshold, and cast from her limp, black sunbonnet a glance towards the hollyhocks.

“Elex,” she called, “I got somethin’ to tell you ! Why, what you got your head all wrapped up for ? Hunh ?”

Alexa stirred with an irritable movement as she said, “Haven’t I been sweeping the parlor ? Do you reckon I want my hair white with tho dust there is in that old carpet ?”

“You’d ought to’v sprinkled tea-leaves onto it,” Mrs. Bohun advised her, “though mercy knows I never encouraged you to scratch round in dusty corners or blind yourse’f hunting out little cobwebs. Spiders is as much God’s creatures as we, and them that’s always persecutin’ ‘em ’ll have it to explain to the Most High. I

hain't it on my conscience that ever I gredged house-room to spiders or mice or flies—no, nor even to roaches! Live and let live, says I."

Alexa passed by her mother's exaltation in this pious remembrance. She asked, yawning, "What was you going to tell me?"

"Law, if I hadn't in-a'most forgot it! Parson's niece was just in, Elex. She came to ask me about Lete Haight. You mind parson being at me to give her work? Well, Miss Linda called to see how I'd decided. And what do you think she let out? You was right, Elex. Since I had the grip I ain't so clear-sighted as I was. You was right. And I'm just as glad things have turned out like they have, for your paw he's heard it chirped round lately that Mr. Dillon 'ain't always been as mild-mouthed and mincin' as he is just now. They say he used to be lively as a cricket, and up to more snuff than ever any person would believe that sees him setting round here with his heels h'isted and his hat into his eyes, looking as peaceable as an unweaned kitten. It was a drummer for plug terbaccer and cigars give your paw the hint. Your paw said he judged that Mr. Dillon was just natchelly triflin'—one of them kind that's always a-slipping and a-straightening, neither dead cull or good timber, but 'bout like a buckeye log that 'll rot at one

end while it sprouts at the other. Rememberin' about that copperhead snake, your paw wasn't willing to believe a word agin Mr. Dillon. But he 'lowed that reason was one of the meanest things in the world for forgin' ahead in spite of you. 'N' I just called it to mind what that drummer'd hinted, and how't Mr. Dillon wasn't no Mason, and all that, while Miss Linda McVeigh was smiling and going on and saying how besittin' the hull thing was, and how like dear Lucy for to make her choice outside of worldly consideration and such. 'I just think,' suz I, 'I'd a heap ruther it was Lucy Morrow than my Elex.'"

Alexa had been listening without any evidences of interest. Suddenly she opened her eyes.

"What are you talking about, ma?" she demanded. "You ramble on till a person loses all track. What are you—what—" She had lifted herself on an elbow and her face had changed. "Lucy Morrow! what about her?"

Mrs. Bohun was searching in her bosom for a pin with which to fasten the buttonless collar of her gown. "'Ain't I just done telling you?'" she asked. "'Ain't I just said that, after all, you was right when you said Mr. Dillon had a notion for Lucy Morrow? At the time I thought you was only letting on about there being noth-

ing betwix' you and him ; now I see you was plumb serious, and I prize your good sense in not being took in by his wheedlin' ways. 'T run in my mind when I set and heard Miss Linda goin' on."

Alexa was sitting erect. Her face had grown almost haggard. "Will you tell me what she said ? I can't make out anything. What—what are you waiting for ? Why don't you say something ?"

"Elexy, you go on at me like I'd done something ! It's like I tell you, honey. Miss Linda said that Mrs. Morrow had told her, quiet and confidential, that Mr. Dillon had asked for Lucy, and that her and the Major had given consent. That's all. Except that I wasn't to breathe it, because they didn't mean to 'announce' it, so she said, till later on."

Alexa gave a long breath. She sat with knees wide and with her figure slouched forward. Her hands hung limply over the sagging hollow of her lap, and her face had a vacant, ugly stare. Mrs. Bohun began to tremble.

"Elex !" she besought, faintly ; "oh, Elex ! you didn't care none for him, did you ?"

Alexa's face hardened, and her lips puffed contemptuously as she said, "Care ? Haven't I told you there wasn't anything ? I'm think-

ing of Lucy Morrow—that's all. I'm thinking of her."

"She'll have her hands full a-workin' to keep him straight," surmised Mrs. Bohun, reassured. "A man like that is like a horse without a mouth; pull and haw as you may, you never got no purchase on him. I'd ruther trust myself with a critter that'd take the bit and light right out; you know where you're at sooner."

Alexa rose, murmuring, "I haven't dusted yet." And, stumbling a little, she turned the house corner and entered the side door, and struggled blindly up the stairs. She did not know where she was going; she had simply a wild instinct of escape, of eluding the sunshine, the open air, the mocking noises of leaf and wind.

From the parlor a shaft of light, still fibrous with dust, widened across the hall. Alexa's eyes avoided it. Treading on her skirts, she went on up the second flight, tearing the gathers from the cotton belt with every unheeding step. Midway of this higher staircase a dark landing intervened, and as the blessed shadows of it fell upon Alexa a sense of giddiness and failing came over her, and she sank on the step, casting her hands against her dizzy eyes.

This was the end of her dreaming. This was the bald, pitiful end. A crew of dim,

hateful presences reeled and whirled before Alexa—a host of furies with spectral faces and blood-flecked breath. In their taunting lips rang a perpetual laughter of scorn and the jibing reiteration of the fact which she had sometimes feared and yet only half believed, and altogether sought to banish from her consciousness—the fact that Dillon did not love her in the least, and had only amused himself a little with her fondness and her folly.

Alexa's whole being revolted in a burning rush of self-contempt as she remembered how lavishly she had poured her heart out at Dillon's feet, and how passively he had received the oblation. It seemed now, in this moment of awakening, as if he had not made any effort to deceive her regarding his affections. She could not recall that he had ever spoken of love. It was all her own doing, this torment which encompassed her. She had been blind ; that was it—blind, and possessed to rear a celestial dome upon a tottering fabric of baseless hopes. A few careless kisses, caressing looks, smiles, flatteries—these had meant nothing to Dillon ; but Alexa, in thinking what they had meant to her, especially at the first, began to feel in her bosom a flame of indignation and a growing sense of a lack of justice in his treatment of her. He had said lit-

tle, indeed ; but had he dealt with her in a fair and manly way ? Had he not tacitly let her believe that he cared for her ? Had he not been grieved to see the least cloud upon her ? Had not his passing fits of indifference been always foiled by moments of the gentlest consideration ?

Alexa asked herself these things angrily, recollecting how she had explained his varying humors upon a theory that he was troubled over a question of the propriety of taking to wife a girl whose station had once been so humble, and whose father still challenged social approbation by an occasional slap at the gods whom the hill folk honored and upheld.

“Oh,” moaned Alexa, reviewing this fallacious idea, “I am dying ! dying !” There was a step on the stairs, but Alexa, in her scorn of herself, did not hear it. A man came hurrying up the steps, whistling a bar of some light melody. At the head of the baluster he caught the despairing breath in the landing above, and looked up and started somewhat. Alexa’s face was hidden. Only a line of black hair showed between the white towel about her brows and the pink nails of her clinched hands ; while, down below her feet, straight as a whip, the even braid fell. In her bent, quivering shoulders was an intimation of such suffering as held

Dillon at a stand ; and almost at once he surmised that she had heard of his betrothal. He winced at the thought of addressing her ; but his instinct of keeping out of the range of unpleasant experiences by a reactive force made him determine to plunge into the chasm and be done with it. So he said, in a kind, questioning voice, “ Alexa !”

Alexa dropped her hands, her face stiffened, and she arose.

“ At odds with life again ?” he pursued.
“ Why, the whole business isn’t worth it !”

Above him in the shadowy landing Alexa stood mutely. The fringed towel-ends defined accurately her slight, yellow throat, which, swollen a little, beat at the side with a slow pulse. Below the linen her thick brows and heavy lips, of the hue of unbaked clay, dully red and motionless, gave her a stolid look, which did not mitigate the growing uneasiness in Dillon’s mind.

“ Has one of your pigeons died, Carita ?” he went on, keeping up his air of jesting.

“ No,” said Alexa, getting at a fair semblance of a voice. And as he came a step or two nearer, and would have taken her hand, she added, “ Don’t come up here !”

He paused, and his eyes flashed. “ Very well,” he said, as quick to wrath as to tender-

ness. "As you please." It occurred to him, however, that for him to be offended with Alexa's pettishness was rather absurd, and he continued, "I am sorry. Forgive me for breaking in upon your unhappiness. I had no right to ask you about it, or to feel that my friendly sympathy might perhaps lessen the sum of any trouble you may have."

Alexa was maintaining an admirable reserve as she coldly regarded the aspect of his lifted face, its swarthiness of sunburn, its clear blueness of eye, and little, gold-dappled, stripling's mustache. How he must be inwardly smiling at the distress which he had surprised!—waiting, perhaps, to feign wonder and regret if a word of reproach should escape her. Alexa, thinking thus, suddenly determined that no such word should gratify him.

"Trouble?" said Alexa. "I have no troubles. Unhappiness—oh, that's different. A gyrl wouldn't deserve such a home and parents as I have if she didn't feel bad to think of leaving them."

"Leaving them? Are you—"

Alexa had gathered her torn skirts about her, preparatory to going up the last three steps. Her hand was on the baluster, and she looked back with a fair show of smiling:

"Didn't you know? Gyrls generally have

to leave home when they marry. I don't reckon Beau McBeath would care to live in any house but his own." Her little sharp laugh flung out above him. Alexa was gone, with some scrap of a war-song on her lips.

Dillon felt oddly taken down. Then he echoed her laugh below the breath. Blended with his relief in her attitude was something not unlike hurt vanity; a certain disbelief in Alexa's statements wavered midway of these two impressions, but he told himself that since the matter had ended so satisfactorily he would do well to forbear to question it.

Meanwhile, in the gabled room overhead, where the soap advertisements unfolded their rainbow gloss and the patchwork carpet lay in a mingled woof, Alexa was pacing in long, hard steps; back and forth she tramped, common, fierce, and wild in her tearless pain. Dillon's mildness and smiling air had pricked her to added bitterness; and as she thought of him and his look of gayety, she stopped short and stretched a sudden hand towards the soft sky beyond her dormer-window, and cried out, passionately, "O God! don't let him be happy!—don't let him be happy!"

XIII

IF Alexa's explanation of the cause of her tragic mood had affected Dillon with a certain sense of incredulity, he found, during the following days, many things which appeared directly confirmatory at least of her statement regarding a betrothal.

Beauregard McBeath's long, fawn-colored coat and broad felt hat and bright blue neck-scarf and beaming face seemed to pervade the hotel ; and always at the hour of Dillon's return from the mill Alexa, smiling, blushing, and demure, was sure to be about the porch or office, listening indulgently to McBeath's talk, interlarded as it was with long looks of speechless rapture.

“Yes,” owned Bohun, looking damp and red around the eyes, “they got it fixed up ! I hardly know whether I’m cryin’ or laughin’ about it, I’m so dazed like. Seems like we’d oughtn’t to give way, seein’ her and Beau is’ happy and all. I says to him when he ast

me, says I, 'I'd ruther it was you, Beau, than sever'l many I could name—you havin' took three degrees and all. But yet it's drorin' teeth for to give up a unly gyrl,' says I. 'You want to keep her in cotton-wool,' I 'lowed, beginnin' to blubber, 'and fahly carry her 'round, or you 'n' me 'll have words.' And Beau he was moppin' his eyes, same as me, and clearin' his throat, and he 'lowed nothing wouldn't be too good for Elexy so long as he had a day's work in him. And what do I do but whimper out, 'God bless ye, Beau!' like I was a believin' man and hadn't reasoned past that there. Yes, sir, I did. And I never took it back neither; for think, suz I, 'it won't do no harm, and may do some good.'"

Once returning from the flats a little earlier than usual in the afternoon, Dillon came upon McBeath, who, for once alone, sat on a rock at the hotel gate whittling a stick to shreds.

"I haven't told you yet," said Dillon, stopping, "how much I congratulate you on your good-fortune. Your lot is enviable, McBeath."

"Thanky," rejoined McBeath, glowing. "If there's a better-favored gyrl in the State than Alexa, I've never met with her."

"And when is the happy event to be, Mac?—soon, eh?"

McBeath's luminous visage shadowed, and he shut his knife with a cheerless click. "That's what's bothering me," he confessed. "She's all for delaying and putting off, and having a lot of furbelows built, and a church wedding, and cyards printed, and a big infair. Why, first off she was going to hold me off for a year; but I plied round and carried on so high that she came down to six months. I felt as if I dassent try to narrow the time like I'd like to, on account of—of—" McBeath paused, and opened his knife again, and thoughtfully tried the blade. "You see, it's this way," he burst out: "I'm in a kind of a hole. I feel as if 'twon't do me no hurt to name it, you and me being hail-feller-well-met and all that. But Alexa's always said she wouldn't marry no man that couldn't turn in and build her a house up yender on the bluff. And I've always promised to do it, for I always judged that there walnut wood of ours would come into the market all right sooner or later, and I never worried much. But t' tell you the dead truth, I ain't so well-heeled right now as I'd find accommodating. I got to figure round a heap. I can't ask Alexa to come and live over in Wayne, in the old place; she'd have a kniption-fit; and my mōther and her wouldn't gee no way; and I can't raise a

cent on the homestead. It's run down, and it belongs, anyway, to my mother. So, you see, I'm studying a heap these days. Lord, if I could only straighten out that walnut-tract business!"

"A splendid piece of timber," remarked Dillon. "I saw it when I went up the South Fork inspecting."

"Prettiest grove in the State. Ought to bring ten thousand."

Dillon, listening, pulled out his mustache in remembering at how much larger a reckoning the logger who was with him on the South Fork trip had estimated the value of the wood. "Right on to the water aidge like it is," the old logger had declared, "all you got to do is to cut it, and there you are. No hauling or such; the river just waiting to freight the sticks to your chute. Lord a'mighty, but the company 'd like to git their hands on that there timber! Walnut's got so skerce the market's clamoring for it, and the mill has orders filed away as it 'll never git to fill on the face o' the yearth!"

"It's a pity to have the tract tied up in the way it is," agreed Dillon, setting his foot on the stone step beside McBeath, "but I suppose there's no way out."

"It's all in trust to my mother," explained

McBeath, "and she'll never see a twig lopped till she knows for certain about that there Maria Conner."

"And you're making no headway in the search?"

"No, sir. That's just it. We ain't. If I'd of got at it sooner maybe matters 'd be different. But Alexa 'd never pass me no promise, and I just left it to Judge Kinney. 'When I hear from Maria Conner I'll let you know,' says he. Judge is getting pretty old, and his mind ain't what it was. He's had a stroke just lately, and they've took him to the Hot Springs. Lord knows when he'll be able to tend to anything."

"Somehow it doesn't seem exactly a business-like arrangement," mused Dillon, thinking of the mill's orders for walnut.

"It ain't," cried McBeath, gloomily. He added, after a while, "It's no use for me to worry myself thin as a June shad, though. Any day may come a letter from the West stating that Conner's sister's dead, or willin' to compromise, or some such trick. Something ought to come to us off that tract. Judge Kinney said so himself. 'Ain't we watched it continual? Why, they wouldn't be a stick of it left if we hadn't gyarded it like a pair of hawks! Yes, sir; whichever way the cat

jumps, I stand to win. All I ask is a letter."

"A letter would certainly ease the situation," smiled Dillon. "When it comes, Mac, if it is such as to put the wood at your own disposal, I wish you would give me a chance to handle it. I'd pay you as much as any one."

McBeath echoed his laugh, put into a gay mood by this prospective bargaining. "I'd rather it was you than most," he cried. "Time was when I hadn't much use for you, but I've got over that. You see, I kind of mistrusted you was beating my time in yender!" He nodded towards the house. "But Alexa like to died laughing when I mentioned it to her the other day—said the love lost between you and her wouldn't serve to wad a shotgun."

"Oh, I never had a chance!" sighed Dillon. "Well, I must go, Mac. You'll remember me when you come into your kingdom? Half down, eh, half when delivered?"

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" gurgled McBeath. "Lord, I wisht I could sign the papers tomorrow!"

"Maybe you can," smiled Dillon. "It all depends—" He drew up, with a sudden thrilling of the pulses, startled, appalled, fascinated by the idea which had flashed on him from

those light, unthinking words. In his temples he could feel a strange trembling, as of quivering nerves. His eyes dazzled, and he perceived himself to be striving to hold his thoughts suspended, to be struggling to keep them from wheeling on to a conclusion which he seemed to see even while he tried to see nothing. Like a man who on the edge of a precipice has begun to fear a vertigo, he made an actual step backward. But the chasm still drew him; its depths called him; and with an effort to regain himself he passed a hand over his eyes, and attempted to fix his gaze upon some detail of the scene around him.

It was past the middle of the afternoon, but a glitter of heat still struck the railway tracks, giving them the look of rivers whose water leaped and sparkled in the green distance. In the singular acuteness of perception which Dillon felt the sky seemed to him to be full of atoms, frothing and whirling in a rush of blue, ceaselessly active, as if life, vibrating in the atmosphere, were endowed in its least point with all the barren restlessness of the soul of humanity. Through the greenish-bronze tints of the opposite hill a little air stirred fitfully, and on the brow of the massive shape a lightning-charred tree, revealing its riven shape

against a distorted cloud, gave him a fancy of a carven crucifix pressed to dying lips.

Village sounds spent themselves distinctly. Dillon was aware of the smallest whir of the insects in the grass beyond the path, yet nothing blurred the sharp outlines of the ideas thronging swift and persuasive below his sense of outward things. What a master-stroke it would be to secure for the mill this cried-up reach of timber ! In how many ways it would profit him if only he were able to secure it, and acting independently, yet in the interest of the company, to deliver the wood to them in the great December tides ! There would be, first of all, a large percentage of profit accruing to him from the operation ; for the price which McBeath had suggested, based upon a better stocked market, would enable the dealer, while disposing of the timber at a fair price, to realize a very considerable margin. As to other matters, it was plain that the mill people could hardly fail to appreciate Dillon's attitude in consigning them the wood ; the way to a partnership in the firm might be managed with Mr. Burkely's aid, and this aid would not be withheld when the old man understood how much skill and energy his nephew had displayed in the transaction. Thus Dillon's marriage would be divested of all those material

difficulties which were beginning to weigh upon him, and life would become an easy thing, and comfort and satisfaction be added to every one.

There was no confusion in Dillon's mind. After that first sense of dizziness everything had grown quite clear. He had no consciousness of yielding to an ugly impulse; there had not been struggle enough to make him feel anything like a moral defeat. It was in a sort of impersonal way that he heard himself adding, "On a letter; everything, it seems, depends on just a letter."

He was directly sensible of a subtle suggestiveness in his voice—a suggestiveness which the air and meadows and hills appeared to understand and develop, but which McBeath might be too doltish in his mental equipment to catch at even dimly. Dillon turned a little and set a casual eye upon the young man. McBeath's lips had fallen apart and his gaze was wide, as if in a blank observation of some unfamiliar and astounding object.

Viewing him, Dillon felt a rush of spirits, and he cried, gayly: "We won't despair. Perhaps there's a message even now on its way to assure your mother that the walnut wood is hers and yours. Butte City was the place, wasn't it, from which you last heard of this

Hannah or Maria Conner?" And with his customary little wave of the hand Dillon went on up the path, leaving McBeath in a sort of mental vacancy upon the stone ledge.

When he afterwards thought of it all a certain vague discomfort touched Dillon. He had a sense of uneasiness and distaste; yet he was able to soothe himself with the assurance that he had said to McBeath nothing which the world might not have heard. If a covert significance had indeed lurked in those few words spoken so lightly, that significance depended entirely upon McBeath's interpretation. If McBeath chose to turn to unadvised account the obscure implication of a passing phrase, the issue lay with him.

He wondered, however, what the character of McBeath's ruminations might be; for, during the next day or so, McBeath certainly seemed to be ruminating upon something. Upon the following Sabbath, as the young countryman went down the road beside Alexa on his way to church, the air of unusual thoughtfulness which environed him was particularly evident, and elicited a jest or two from the loungers about the station.

"Begins to see that marriage is a serious thing," said the agent.

"M-yes," agreed the engineer. "Feels the

hook in his gills, and begins to think of the skillet!"

That afternoon, as Dillon sat with several men in the side-yard, waiting for the three o'clock train to bring the Cincinnati papers, he saw McBeath approaching him in the shade of the trees.

"Awful hot, ain't it?" said McBeath, wiping out his hat. And making a gesture towards the sphinx knob, he inquired, "Ever been on top?"

"Never."

"Well," declared McBeath, with an earnestness which the subject seemed scarcely to warrant, "you'd be su'prised the way the air stirs up there! There's a breeze on top of that knob when not a breath's whiffin' down here. And the view, too! Something great!"

"Yes?" said Dillon.

"Er—why—you wouldn't care to go up?"

"I don't think I would. It's something of a climb, Mac."

"No, sir! no, sir! easy path jogs up the side." McBeath paused, and kicked a hole in the turf with his heel. "To tell the truth," he owned, "I'd like to get off some place. I been turning something in my mind overnight, and I'd like to advise with you, if you didn't care."

Dillon let the legs of his chair down. "It

isn't train-time by an hour," he said. "I don't know that I mind a stroll, if I can be of any service to you."

The sphinx knob did not confirm McBeath's assertions regarding the ease of its ascent; it appeared to Dillon steeper than any one would have dreamed from a casual inspection of its bulk; and more than once he fetched up breathless in the ragged cow-path braiding its side in wandering curves. Tall yellow weeds, thick with straw-tassels, rustled sharply as the two men brushed through them. A world of insect murmurs rose under their feet, and tree-toads overhead were uttering a reedy presage of rain.

The head of the knob was coiffed in flat limestone, over which a kind of ivy, brightly scarlet and of a waxen texture, trailed a flaming net. White-oak saplings, also reddening, burned from every crevice of the upland rock, and here and there a wand of golden-rod charmed the air with languid passes. Purple flowers, low-growing and rich in odors, carpeted the flat places along the ridge of the rise, where, grazing the late pasturage, a few long-horned cattle ranged with a pastoral tinkling.

Below, like a toy world, the little trees and houses of the village scattered the valley. High on the east bluff the hotel, buttressed in hewn

rock, peaked its slight towers in a density of surrounding leaf. Something impressive and picturesque was lent it by the shade and distance; it might have been a deeply moated stronghold, and the garment hung to dry in one of the gable windows a betokening scarf; while a lank gray horse rounding the hill road added a graphic detail to the scene, though instead of a mailed knight he bore only a bare-legged lad, who straddled a housing of ancient blanket.

The Cumberland bent like a hook in its high banks. The bridge was a mere web, a thing of froth and spray, caught in the foliage of the cliffs. The red church spire was more than ever like a rapier painted to the hilt; and above the far-off tracks the railway signal, like a scarlet cap lifted on a bayonet, suggested some wild trophy of war, set off against the sadder emblem of carnage and defeat.

“There wasn’t no fighting hereabouts during the war,” remarked McBeath, pausing—“at least, not any nearer than Mill Springs. But that there lightning-burned tree yender used to be a staff for signals. It’s got bullets in it, too. Look at that one peeping from the rotten bark. I reckon the soldiers fired into it for luck.”

Dillon picked up a fragment of wood in which a blue, leaden spot shone dully. “Noth-

ing altogether belittles the dignity of a bullet," he said. "I respect a bullet. It has an air of potentiality. It may not be doing any harm, but it looks capable of it, like the eye of a pretty nun."

"One of the biggest trees in our walnut tract has a spike of lead in it," advanced McBeath. "It's the one Conner was laying under when they found him. Yes, sir, it's been there thirty year. The more I think of it the more— Why, say, Mr. Dillon, I'll tell you what's come into my head this last day or so. You remember passing the remark that everything seemed to hinge on a letter—"

"I suppose there isn't much doubt of my profound observation being true, Mac!"

"Er—no. But seems like I got a new light on it when you says it over, kind of signifying and slow."

"I'm glad if I said anything of an enlightening nature—I didn't know it, certainly!"

McBeath faltered a little. "Well, I didn't know whether you meant anything or not."

"Meant anything? What are you driving at, McBeath?" Dillon turned with an inquiring frown, dropping the hand through which he had been looking at the *Daniel Boone*, a nutshell of a boat, resembling a fleck of rust on the scythe-like twist of the river.

"I somehow got the notion," stammered McBeath, "that you sympathized with me, and felt like I do about its being dog-gone foolishness to keep that tract standing while we search all over creation for some one to come and claim it. And about the—the letter, you know. Why, I figured round, and I'll tell you the idea that struck me. S'pos'n' my mother could be got to sign a quit-deed or some such thing, would there be anything wrong in me selling the walnut and building me a house and laying the rest of the money by at good interest, so in case the Conner heirs turns up I could hand 'em over the balance, and give 'em a mortgage on the new house, if they didn't see fit to allow me that much for my trouble in keeping the timber for 'em?"

"I don't see anything wrong in that. Only —your mother— how would you satisfy her morbid scruples?"

McBeath caught joyously at the last words. "That's it!" he cried. "She's plumb morbid over this business. And when folks gets all skew-gee brooding on things, why, it seems only right to straighten 'em out, even—even—"

"If one has to use strategy?"

"Yes, sir. Trouble is, I ain't much of a mechanic that way. When it comes to deceiving any one—"

“Deceiving? Are you thinking of— But it’s your own business. Of course, we both know that truth is only a question of the point of view. A hawk looks white as a dove in some lights.”

“Of course. Everything’s the way you look at it, ain’t it? At the same time—why—you see, I hate to come right out and tell my mother what isn’t true, and let on that I’ve had word from Butte City when I haven’t. Beating round the bush wouldn’t work with my maw. She’d ask me flat-footed if the woman was dead.”

“And do you know she isn’t?” Dillon’s voice had a note of weariness.

McBeath brightened as he declared that, after all, he would probably be inside the limits of strict truthfulness if he should positively announce Maria Conner’s demise. They had begun to go down the briery path, disturbing a covey of little brown birds which, like a rush of dry leaves, fluttered on before them. Dillon began to speak of the nature and habits of these small creatures, dismissing, apparently, all thought of McBeath and McBeath’s plans and projects. Alexa’s lover began to look troubled at this withdrawal of interest. At the foot of the hill he stopped.

“Do you want to handle that timber?” said he, in a sort of brusque, defiant fashion.

Dillon glanced mildly into the other's perturbed face. "When it's in the market," he said, "I should certainly like to have a chance at it."

McBeath kicked a stone out of the way. "Half down, you said?"

"That is usual, I believe."

"Could it be fixed by next week?"

"Oh, I think so!" smiled Dillon, watching the train swing into sight across the bridge.

XIV

“If 'twas me,” sighed Mrs. Bohun, while she threaded a needle in a dreamy way, “I'd have me a porch facing the station, so's I could set out and see who came and went on trains. And I'd have a good big press built off the kitchen, so's I could just pile the dishes into it and leave 'em stand overnight when I didn't feel like worshin' 'em. And every last—”

“Ma,” broke in Alexa, “do quit planning over that house! Why, Beau isn't really paid down on the lot yet.”

“Well, he's got it all picked out, ain't he? Law, Elex, it's a great mercy that his timber track's all out of litigation! I was right pleased when word came that he could go ahead and sell. Of course,” interpolated Mrs. Bohun, with an afterthought, “I mourned as sincere as any one over Maria Conner being gone, but she's better off, and we got to bow to God's will. And seein' we never knew her makes it easier to bear!”

A great scarlet-and-white quilt, pieced in the "Lost Lover" design, was spread on stretchers in the family-room, and at one end of it Mrs. Bohun, bending over the frame, was taking little stitches in the checkered surface. Alexa sat opposite, languidly drawing her needle through the squares.

"Seems like you ain't half as proud of the fine new house Beau's going to raise for you as I was over the log-cabin your paw took me to. Law, them was days ! Both Pulaski County, we was, born and raised. Our kin immygrated from *Tennissy* mighty nigh a hundred year ago, Elex. Yes, 'n' they fit the Injuns. I've heard your great-gran'pap Hopper narrate about fighting under Lieutenant McClure and downing a hull raft of redskins up yender. They had slaves in Pulaski in them days, and a full and plenty of everything—wild turkey and deer for the powder, and good crops and fine whiskey to their hand. And, law, the log-raisin's and corn-huskin's they used to have ! These hill folks, they hold their heads high and are mighty notionate and fine-haired, but they hain't any idy of real good times. Not one of 'em's simon-pure Pulaski. I wouldn't wish to throw it up to 'em, of course, but so 'tis. Now your great-gran'pap Hopper minded well when they wasn't but the one store in Somerset. He

was Pulaski to the backbone. Law me, Elex, you'll have to take lesser stitches than them ! I wouldn't have old lady McBeath pitch an eye on to them stitches for nothing on the face of the earth. She's a terrible finicky house-keeper, they tell."

Alexa leaned back in her chair with a darkening face. "She won't be called on to overlook my affairs," said the girl. "I don't feel any too friendly since I heard she named it that she didn't believe in Beau's building, and that I'd ought to be satisfied to come and live in the old place. Huh, I'd like to see myself!"

"I'd rather pull fodder for a living than live with a husband's folks," agreed Mrs. Bohun. "Young couples ought to be to theirse'ves. I've never yet seen the house was big enough for two families. Hark, Elex ; ain't that No. 10 blowing ? Run and see if anybody gets off."

Dillon was swinging himself to the rear platform of the North-bound train as Alexa reached the window. He wore the air of contentment which had lately become usual with him, and was waving a gay farewell to some one on the station steps—probably to Corinne Morrow, who, as the train moved and the throng on the tracks lessened, disclosed herself in her father's hand, still tossing kisses after the vanishing cars. Alexa's lips tightened.

"How I hate him!" she thought. And in an instant, as Dillon's smiling eyes and gesture of farewell were still before her, she repeated, "I hate him!" and caught a sob in her throat and lost the haunting vision in hot tears.

Meantime Dillon, unfolding a newspaper, had composed himself for the half-day's journey to Cincinnati, and while his eyes scanned the news was arranging certain details of a coming interview with his uncle. He had written to Mr. Burkely that in spite of his own unworthiness he had found grace with Lucy. He had not, so he wrote, deceived her in the general matter of his past life. As to the actual happening which most deeply marred that past, this, he said, he had not spoken of. His heart failed him when he thought of reading to Lucy so dark a page, not because he feared that she would turn from him in contempt—for she was too sweet and gentle to despise a broken heart and contrite spirit—but because he could not bear to shadow her youth with such knowledge of sin. Lucy had lifted him from the ashes where he lay; she had saved him, renewed him, knowing that he had walked in dark and thorny ways and taken many a hurt. Was it necessary that she should have to see in ugly exactitude the grinning shape of every gin which had taken him by the heel?

Was it not wiser to leave these traps and toils in obscurity, telling her only of their presence, and saving her from the pain of actual sight?

Dillon said that he had often and anxiously pondered upon the question, and had decided against the revelation of any knowledge which may be depended on to embitter an innocent soul. Over the new life to which his spirit looked with so much hope and thankfulness he could not bring himself to cast a darkness that must change Lucy's sunlight into shade. His own days could never free themselves from a bleak and hateful memory; but Lucy!—must Lucy bear, too, the burden of his shame?

So Dillon had written, adding that if his uncle believed it wiser to disclose everything to Lucy's people, he would bow to the decree. In reply Mr. Burkely had telegraphed: "Cannot decide; come North at once; much disturbed."

This message arrived in the nick of time, for the matter of the walnut wood had meanwhile arisen, and Dillon's need of seeing Mr. Burkely had become additionally imperative. He had a feeling that it would not be hard to persuade his uncle to agree with him regarding the folly of distressing Lucy with those old mischances. And as to the question of the walnut, Dillon was sure that Mr. Burkely would find satisfac-

tion and pride in assisting him with the preliminary payments.

“So he gave you the option, did he, as soon as he came into possession—this young man McBeath? Preferred to deal with you rather than the mill?” the old man would chuckle. “Well, Burkely, it seems to pay—this being an agreeable fellow. Go ahead, my lad, and of course you may draw on me for the advance.”

A prevision of this cheerful declaration was running in Dillon’s head as he glanced from the window at Junction City and saw the South-bound train on the opposite track. A man in the smoking-car nodded towards him in a gruff fashion. It was Dunbar, red and square of visage behind the lowered pane.

“What’s taking the fellow North?” mused the mill president, returning to his cigar. “Mischief of some sort, no doubt. Yet it isn’t easy to associate the idea of mischief with that eye of his. And his diffidence, or furtiveness, or whatever it is, rather prejudices a man in his favor.” Dunbar sighed. “Poor Nat! he doesn’t appeal to the imagination, I suppose. Lucy couldn’t identify him with her ideals. He’s too simply planned, too obviously good. Not theatrically and imposingly good, but plainly and undramatically upright, without wings or halo. This other fellow, no doubt,

seems to her much more of a man. His sins, if she knows them, probably seem to her evidences of superior virility. Women have somehow got the idea that vice in men is sex ; that we are masculine in proportion as we are bad. In such a condition of things a young man's got to have considerable moral courage to venture to live decently. All women's fault !—all their fault ! Well, thank God, I've no mission to set the times right. Let 'em wag ! My present object is to climb the bluff and request a few words with Major Morrow."

Yet this duty was not an enviable one, and on alighting from the train at Streamlet, Dunbar looked about to see if Taliaferro might not be in sight for a moment of strengthening conference. The doctor, however, did not seem to be among the men on the platform, and upon asking for him in the office he found that he was supposed to be "down Tateville way."

When Dunbar finally came down the hotel steps addressed doggedly to his task it was late in the afternoon, and the four-o'clock express had already thundered by, casting the usual mail-bag over the brow of the hill, where it lay in a brown heap. A white cow stretched itself at ease in the path, moulting its cud with placid, black-lined lips, and switching a long tail over its ridging back. Dunbar stepped around

the recumbent shape and made his way up the last little rise of the road.

Under one of the great wayside trees a pile of cedar posts lay in a square block, and at sight of them Dunbar felt a desire to sit and rest himself in the shade; but though he paused he did not yield to his inclination to stop and enjoy the prospect and so put off the evil hour, but only planted his feet more firmly in the road and pressed forward.

All the roses in the Morrows' yard were past blooming, and many of the slender, finely pincered leaves of the thick coppice were white now and transparent with the ravages of some worm or bug. The lawn was fresh as ever, and the porch vines had still a wide purple flower here and there in their dark tangles, like a scattering of gems in a woman's hair. Behind them, according to his habit, the Major sat drowsing. At the sound of Dunbar's steps he awakened with his customary dignity and rose.

"Well," said Dunbar, seating himself, "this weather doesn't look much like a tide."

"Singularly dry," agreed the Major—"singularly so." And presently, as Dunbar continued to maintain an embarrassed and peculiar silence, he asked, "Have you lately returned from the North?"

"Yes," admitted Dunbar, put to the plunge

by this opening. "Yes—just got in an hour since. And, Major, while I was in Cincinnati I had occasion to look rather narrowly into the ways of a young man in whom perhaps you, as well as myself, have some interest. I speak of Mr. Burkely's nephew. It—it isn't a pleasant topic. I don't know just how to begin to—to speak of the matter."

He seemed indeed at a loss, and the Major murmured, deeply, "You surprise me very much."

Dunbar took breath, and faced round and struck into his story. He made short work of the relation, sitting bolt-upright, with his eyes on the distant rivers. At the end of a moment the Major also had become very erect in his chair, and, with his immobile eyes fixed incredulously on the other's rubicund face, was striking his knee in a disturbed fashion.

"I can scarcely credit this," he confessed. "There is no possibility of mistake?"

"No, Major Morrow, I'm sadly afraid there isn't. I went to the Jonases myself. As I was already in possession of the facts, they couldn't well deny me the word of confirmation which was all I asked. Oh, Burkely shouldn't have concealed this thing—at least, not from me! If he'd been frank with me I should have taken the young man into the mill just the same, for I only did it, anyway, on Burkely's account, and

it might have made a difference"—Dunbar hesitated—"in some other directions."

The Major seemed to be plunged in thought. After a moment he said, slowly, "Yes, it might have made a difference. I need not tell you that Mr. Dillon has been on a very familiar footing in my family—yes, very. In short, I have listened to his proposal for my daughter's hand." The Major's voice had a moved accent, and Dunbar, greatly distressed, rose suddenly.

Women were talking somewhere within the house, and a girl's laughter rang out softly as Dunbar said: "I am pained—pained. Major, believe me, I—"

"I have to thank you for an inestimable service," Major Morrow interposed, also rising. He had a worried look as he added: "I am afraid to think how this will affect Lucy. She—I'm afraid she is very much attached to the young man."

"Better a single sharp wrench than a life-long anguish," fell in Dunbar, grasping the Major's hand. "Good-bye. I hope I've acted wisely. I've tried to. Good-bye, Major!" And he tramped down the walk, clearing his throat with some violence.

An hour later, as the west began to yellow for sunset and birds were noisily disputing for

sleeping-quarters in the persimmon-trees near the gate, Mrs. Morrow, who had been engaged in a long conference with her husband, appeared at the library door, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes and murmuring: "My poor, sweet child! Oh, Major, I don't see how I can tell her! Oh, Lucy! Lucy!"

"Leave it to me," insisted the Major; but though his tone was not in the least insistent, Mrs. Morrow began to demur.

"No," she sobbed—"no, Major; it is a woman's part. I do not say you would not try to break this dreadful news gently; but a mother, Major—a mother will find the tenderest way." She composed herself thereupon, and crossed the wide hall and halted in the open doorway of the drawing-room beyond.

The frilled, thin curtains were moving in the evening air, a breath of which rippled also through the fleece of a great white pelt before the log-heaped fireplace. Even the sharply split leaves of a tall palm in a corner stirred a little in the soft breeze. Everything had an aspect of life and energy, and Lucy's hand, as it moved among the small teacups of a spidery, old-fashioned cherry table near the south window, seemed to be impelled with the same gentle force which animated the objects round about.

"Are you going to have some tea at last?" inquired Lucy, regarding the tiny spurt of flame below the small brass kettle. "It's really too late. But you all seemed so deeply engaged in the library that I didn't venture to disturb you. The water seems to be all boiled away. Will you wait?" She looked up from the pretty array of blue delf and bits of fringed linen and little spoons. Above her the greenish wall gleamed with a narrow mirror, branching at the base in two spiring groups of wax-candles, which seemed to repeat the sunset-tinged whiteness of her simple, short-waisted frock and the shine of the pearl in the single ring upon her hand.

"Lucy!" said Mrs. Morrow, coming nearer. "Oh, Lucy!"

Lucy turned sharply, with her brownish eyes aghast and her lips falling apart in a horror of apprehension.

"Don't look so frightened," besought Mrs. Morrow. "Nothing is—is wrong. That is—oh, I wish I knew how to tell it! Mr. Dillon—"

"Is he dead?" whispered Lucy.

"Dead? No, he isn't dead. Perhaps if he were it would be just as well!"

"Mamma!"

"Lucy, I mean it. I fear we have all been very much deceived in Mr. Dillon—very, very

much deceived. We have just discovered that he hasn't been at all frank with us about himself. Lucy, he hasn't been—what he should have been!"

Lucy mechanically set straight the lid of the tea-caddy. Her delicately lined brows were twitching.

"He hasn't deceived *me*," she said. "From the very first he told me that—"

"Yes, Lucy. In a large, general way he indicated that his life had not been altogether irreproachable. He intimated this to us all, and we thought him laudably conscientious. But he didn't tell us, Lucy, that he'd been really dishonorable. He didn't say that he'd betrayed a—a business trust, and that if his uncle had not settled everything he would have had to suffer the punishment appointed for such deeds."

Lucy was standing up and pushing back her light, bright hair as if it blinded her. "Dishonorable!" she repeated, in a sort of vacant voice. "What—how—"

"Dearest child, it is only too plain—his wrong-doing. But, thank Heaven, we have found out his unworthiness in time. He has been dishonest, Lucy, and sadly dissipated as well. Your father will tell you the details if you want to hear them."

Lucy had taken a step towards the door, still with a look of dulness in her white face. "I have got to hear them," she said, heavily. And then her voice, her glance, became suddenly infused with life. "But I am sure—sure beforehand—that there will be nothing I do not know or cannot forgive."

She brushed into the hall, and Mrs. Morrow, dropping into a capacious chair, fell to weeping. Some time later she heard a door close, and, bending forward, she heard Lucy going slowly up the curving staircase.

"Lucy," she cried, gently, "has he told you? Have you—"

Lucy looked over the baluster, upon which her arm lay heavily. She was mortally white. Her features seemed shrunken and hollow. "Yes," she said, simply, "I have heard everything. When Mr. Dillon comes back, will you tell him that I would rather not see him any more?"

XV

Two days afterwards, as the afternoon train burst from the darkness of the tunnel and shot out upon the airy brightness of the lofty bridge, Dillon, gathering up his luggage, was sensible of a throb of pronounced happiness. He had been away scarcely half a week, yet his return had the zest of a long and enforced absence; and when he looked from the window and saw how beautiful Streamlet was in its autumnal guise, he said to himself that his pleasure in seeing the knob again was explainable on more grounds than one.

All over the hills a mingling sheen of red and saffron and purple subtilized the waning foliage, while the coarse grass and tall weeds of the lowlands were matted in a snarl of dull olive. Through thinning masks of leaf the stern faces of the cliffs began to frown, and where a hint of white had scarcely touched the wayside thickets walls of little houses were stealing into sight. Summer seemed as if catching together

her green skirts, drawing in their rich abundance for a swift departure. Already her light foot faltered in the fat valley, and the mellow atmosphere hung low and soft, as it might be in a parting benediction.

Mountain showers had swollen the rivers enough to enliven trade a little in the town, the mill-stacks were misted in vaporous white, stave-buckers were beating away at piles of rugged oak, and certain crimson-wrapped parcels in the arms of an occasional passer in the lower roads indicated increased activity on the part of the stores.

Everything had prospered in Dillon's hand during his absence. Mr. Burkely had made no question of his willingness to advance whatever might be necessary in concluding the purchase of the McBeath timber, and he had furthermore expressed considerable interest in his nephew's plans.

"So they've at last put the wood on the market, have they?" he said. "I've heard that there was some legal complication in the case. Be sure of your ground, Burkely. This is quite a deal for you, my boy—quite a deal. We will show them yet that you are a trader!" Then, with a different and less assured manner, he continued, "I wish I felt as able to decide upon this other business—this affair which con-

cerns Miss Morrow. Of course, it pleases me to know that you have won the regard of such a girl as she appears to be. I remember her very well. She seemed to me a nice, maidenly young girl, like the girls in the books I read when I was young—girls who wore roses in their hair, and blushed easily, and belonged generally to the soft and milky rabble of woman-kind that is so despised nowadays. At first I had an idea that Miss Morrow might be of the modern type a man hears so much about—critical, and full of philosophies and theories and God knows what. But after I had looked at her a while she seemed to me very young and gentle somehow, and I felt—I felt as if I should have spoken more plainly concerning you. I'm an old-fashioned man, you see, and it touched me—her not seeming exactly of the highly intellectual and determinedly progressive order, but just a simple-hearted girl, like the girls I told you I used to read of and like. These girls who used to be popular in stories had always, I recall, the firmest sort of principles, despite their liability to faint away when anything happened. Maybe that's why Miss Morrow reminded me of them. There's a sort of austerity in her face, Burkely, though it's a little face enough, and soft-featured, and all that. I remarked it. And I'm not so sure she

would take certain—revelations which, I believe, ought to be made, as composedly as you fancy. A few simple, primal intuitions of right and wrong, honor and shame—these are harder to combat than any amount of theories and philosophies and systems."

"You think, then, that in being frank with Lucy I would risk everything that gives my life promise?"

"Burkely, I—"

"Yet you are going to induce me to tell her the whole wretched business. Very well. I had hoped to save her the pain of it. That is all. For I believe you are mistaken in thinking she won't forgive me."

"Perhaps, Burkely, perhaps." The old man's tones were incredulous but wavering.

After this they talked over the matter a long time and from different points of view, till finally Mr. Burkely, worn out and unsettled, conceded the argument. "You may be right," he said. "I seem to—to feel that you may be wiser than I in this. But—"

"I don't want to oppose your judgment."

"Well, well," commented the other, with a kind of querulous impatience, "let things be. You're not trying to save yourself. That's what persuades me. You're trying to save her."

Dillon felt sure he had no other motive than the generous one imputed to him, and he began to have a nobly sacrificial sort of feeling, as if, somehow, his own burden were made heavier by his refusal to slip half of it upon Lucy's shoulders. Some pleasant haunting of this sentiment was still with him when he reached the hotel office and set his travelling traps on the ink-stained table and stood debating upon the satisfaction he would have in seeing Lucy for the briefest moment before going to the mill. Unquestionably, it would stand him in good stead to go straightway to the mill and exhibit a praiseworthy interest in business affairs. But Lucy was to be considered too ; it would please her to know he had yielded to his desire to see her ; and upon this gratifying base he decided to go up hill instead of down.

The door of the family-room was ajar, and Mrs. Bohun's tones, lifted in an exculpatory accent, ranged through the office.

"I done what I could, Mr. McVeigh," she was saying. "More, angels haven't the power. I sent her word she could come and help with the worsh, and she 'lowed she had a hang-nail and couldn't rub. And I got out a passel of sheets for her to turn and darn, and she sent word she'd never 'd had no knack at sew-

ing, and wouldn't like to try. So findy I told the boy to put out and see could she clean winders—a thing, Mr. McVeigh, which, I pass my word, I don't need done no more 'n a cat needs two tails—and she said she'd like well to oblige me, only she was liable to get dizzy setting on to a sill. And I just says, 'Well, if that Lete Haight can't help herse'f some little, it's a pore show for them as tries to help her.' She ain't honing much to turn a new leaf, Mr. McVeigh. Nature is nature. A buzzard 'll leave fresh meat any day for carrion."

"But by mercy and truth iniquity is purged," argued the preacher. "How shall we answer in the last day if we have been slack to seek out the faltering and set straight the feet of them that stumble?"

Mrs. Bohun cleared her throat in a way which suggested that she had taken this question as an imputation upon her piety.

"I don't know how some 'll see fit to answer," she declared. "But if any such question's put to me, I'll say flat-footed that I had other fish to fry. I'll tell 'em all that since I was high enough to pick terbaccer worms off my great-gran'pap Hopper's patch I've labored and slaved, and spun and wove, and worshed and i'ned, and cooked and tended babies, and seen to my family, and lent a hand to any neigh-

bor who was sick or hard-pressed, and went to meetin' when I got the chance. And I'll tell 'em that I've never seen the time when I was free to go traipsin' about hunting them as had the same sense as others for to stick to the path and be respected, but liked it better to cavort around and give the town a bad name. Though the serryphims and them should thwaek me over the head with their harps for being so free, I should tell that I never refused bread to the hungry, or cherished hard feelin's agin a livin' soul. And if I got to go and burn in quenchless fire because I hain't shed tears over thieves and rapscallions, and took mean women and murdererers and sots to my bosom, all right, I can go, and no bones broke."

The preacher began to expostulate, and Dillon went on his way smiling, yet with an indefinable discomfort, which, as he came in range of the Morrows' dwelling, entirely disappeared. Beyond, in a shady place at the edge of the bluff, a woman was sitting—a woman who, upon nearer view, appeared to be Mrs. Morrow, with her romantic face pensively inclined upon her hand and a great volume of light draperies billowing around her on the grass.

At her feet, with small slippers in the air, Corinne lay crooning over a large book; it was

she who first caught sight of Dillon, and as she did so she scrambled up and clapped her hands and cried out. To Dillon's surprise Mrs. Morrow turned upon the child a face of stern interdiction. He could not hear her words, but he saw Corinne, with her book clasped to her bosom, cross the road and let herself in at the gate and go wailing up the path.

A forecast of wrong and trouble retarded his step. Mrs. Morrow, without regarding his approach, sat in some appearance of awaiting it. When he came up with rather an uncertain phrase of greeting, she bowed, but so coldly that his heart failed.

“Lucy,” he stammered, “she is well?”

Mrs. Morrow's eyelids expressed a moderate confirmation concerning Lucy's health. “She is not ill; but of course the storm which has broken upon her has not been without its result. It is necessary for me to say, Mr. Dillon, that we have all suffered very much from your—er—injustice towards us. You have deceived us. It is, of course, a painful subject. Perhaps it will be better not to dwell on it. Lucy desires me to say that—that—” She felt herself hesitating. In Dillon's absence it had seemed impossible not to credit the proof of his delinquencies. In-

dignation towards him and a purpose of resolute austerity were easy and natural. But now that he sat beside her on the bench, with a sort of boyish wonder and perplexity and pain in his blue eyes, with all the swarthy color dying in his face and a piteous tremor in the scrap of fair beard, it was unexpectedly difficult to believe him of a froward and reprobate nature, one who had been skilful in evil devices, weak, and without honor.

As to Dillon, a darkness seemed to be widening about him. Corinne's distant laments multiplied about him till the whole soft September air appeared to be thronged with grieving spirits. An anguish of comprehension engulfed him. They had uncovered, then, his transgression; and on a sudden his life was laid waste and empty, with a breeding of nettles where roses had so lately been.

"I regret it," said Mrs. Morrow, not very clear as to what she was saying, and overcome with something remarkably like pity for Dillon, who, with a groan, had sunk back in the seat. He looked stunned. His hands lay upon his knees, and though his lips were apart they seemed breathless.

"I couldn't bear to have her know," he whispered. "My dove, my dove! I couldn't bear to wound her!" His eyes were wet, and he set a

dim gaze upon the ground. "I knew I wasn't worthy of her. If I had known her sooner I shouldn't have been what I am. And even afterwards she could have made anything of me. Honor and power—but now there is nothing left for me, I suppose, but perdition. The shortest way is the way I had better take."

Mrs. Morrow began to have a queer obstruction in her throat. She wished he would try to exonerate or defend himself, so that her powers of reason and judgment might make way against the emotion which was rising in her at the sight of his simple abasement. But he did not attempt excuses, and at length, "You had bad companions, I suppose?" she advanced.

Dillon did not make use of this foothold. "I was my own worst enemy," he said, in a sort of still despair. "I don't think any one is to blame for my folly. I don't know how it happened. I was down before I realized that I had stumbled. And afterwards I made no effort. I had nothing to live for; not even a memory. My poor mother, always pale and scared, my father, with his besotted cruelties—these weren't things to look back on. A stronger-fibred man might have felt responsible for himself. I am not strong, except in my

affections. I thought it was all over till I met Lucy. She could have saved me. I was clay in her hands. Now"—he cast a burning glance about him—"now, I suppose, I shall never see her again."

Mrs. Morrow was stammering, "Perhaps it's better so. She—she does not wish it—she—"

At the first word Dillon cried out, "Not that! Oh, not that! Let me see her—once—only once more! She was to be my wife! Oh, Lucy!"

Mrs. Morrow was convulsively searching for her handkerchief. The Major would be very angry if she should permit Dillon a last word with Lucy—no doubt he would be very angry; but perhaps they had been too severe in their judgments upon this stricken young man, whose sins, after all, lay far behind him, and of whom Lucy might have made anything. "We who are strong ought also to bear the infirmities of the weak," she reminded herself, apologetically. What right had she or any one else to withhold the hand from a fellow-creature who sought to lift himself from the edge of an abyss? to say to him, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me, for I am holier than thou?"

"Only for a word," Dillon was pleading. "I

won't try to move or unsettle her. She is right to—to decide against me."

"I may be doing wrong," breathed Mrs. Morrow, "but I cannot bring myself to refuse you. Lucy is walking in the highland pasture out behind the house. I hope—I—"

Dillon got up with a murmur of passionate gratitude, and turned and went up the road a little way, and presently vanished in the path which swings about the brambly knoll overlooking the bridge. Beyond the bluff a reach of wild upland grass coursed off to the limit of the blue-and-white sky. Trees grew sparsely, and the bushes were low and threadbare from the sweep of high winds. Even the grass had a coarse, dishevelled look, and matted the ground in a confusion of sallow green, over which a small herd of common cattle was browsing, cropping the bearded blade and nosing the scattered mullen.

Across the rough sward a cow-bell or two rang peacefully, and there was no other sound except the light rustling of the breeze and the occasional plaintive outcry of a red calf, which stood in the shade of some saplings at the edge of a marshy basin to the southward.

Hard by this damp hollow a solitary beech, throttled in wild grape-vines, spread its branches against the low blue of the sky with an effect

of appeal against the crushing, clinging parasite. And as Dillon came upon the levels and sped a hurried eye along the lonely length of houseless highland, he saw that Lucy was standing near the tall tree, tranced in some incurious study of the far-off hills.

He drew near with a muffled step, hurt to the heart at the difference in Lucy's looks. In the little lapse of these few maturing days she appeared to have grown visibly older. The hint of sternness in her face had deepened and developed, and a kind of patient and repressed sorrow clouded her spring-like beauty. She leaned slightly forward, as if she listened. One hand was set against her waist; the other hung as if it had dropped in a heavy, hopeless gesture.

All the smallest details of her presence impressed themselves on Dillon as he stayed himself to watch her through the vague green of the vines which encompassed her in woodland shades and set vernal traceries upon the flat, colorless folds of her gown. The set lines of her mouth, the sad preoccupation of her eyes, the shining of the loose hair about her brows, these one by one he took in, not missing such trifling things as the gray shade on the breadth of her thin sleeve, or the fringe of Spanish needles in her garment's hem.

Some rustling in the sun-cured grass carried

his footstep to her, and without appearing startled Lucy turned a quiet face and saw him. Her attitude had barely altered, and her eyes fell on him in so distant and composed a way that Dillon faltered. This was not the pliant girl whose heart had been so easily won to pity his years of pain and misadventure, and whose noblest intuitions of responsibility and protection had been roused by his dependence. Grief, he could see, had made her a diviner of many things. She was no longer wondering and gentle, and simple as truth and innocence are simple. It seemed to him that her heart, upon the softness and tenderness of which he had so confidently reckoned, was as a fountain sealed, a spring shut up. And overwhelmed with a new and complete sense of hopelessness, he cried out, bitterly:

“Lucy! Is this you, so cold and hard as this? Have you nothing to say to me—not one word?”

XVI

As his voice rang out in the stillness of the upland meadows Lucy caught her breath and seemed to tremble a little. She did not speak, however, and Dillon, in a broken way, exclaimed, "He was right—poor old man! My uncle was right. He felt sure that you would cast me off if you were told everything. But I said I believed you were too gentle and kind to strike down the wretched hand that appealed to you for life. Yet it's happened. You've done this, Lucy—you, whom I have loved better than my own soul; and you have done it at the first breath of accusal, without giving me any poor chance of justification. I'm not complaining, though it's hard to be left to perish at the very gate of—of—heaven. I only want to tell you, Lucy, that I didn't deceive you through cowardice or meanness exactly. If I withheld the particular instance which I suppose they have brought before you—whoever they are—it was because I felt it would be wrong to

make you share my unending punishment. That was what kept me silent—nothing but that. God knows, I believed that, since you had been so generous in forgiving the general evil, you would not be merciless to a specific sin. For I didn't deny, did I, that my life had been all wrong? That I had loved to wander and had not refrained my feet? Didn't I even say that I had come to feel as if my moral nature must be defective, somehow? Wasn't I altogether hopeless till I met you, Lucy, and was renewed—saved, I thought? O God, the mystery of the change! Now—" He paused, and as the memory of some words, solemn and impressive in their Old Testament simplicity, floated upon him, he added, "Now thorns have come up in the palace that I builded; nettles and brambles have sprung on the threshold where in dreams I saw your dear foot pass. It is become a habitation for dragons, a court for owls." He was shaken with tears. "Say something!" he implored her. "Oh, Lucy, say something to me!"

"I don't know what to say," faltered Lucy, distressed at the sight of his emotion. "When I heard what you had done I felt ashamed and dishonored. I—but I don't want to talk about it. I can't! I hoped I might never see you again, because I hoped to be spared this—the

pain of telling you that I feel as if it would be degrading, debasing, to continue to love a man who has been guilty of despicable actions. I hate to use such a word, but I want to be plain."

Dillon staggered back, saying, "Plain!—that is plain enough, certainly—'despicable!'" A breath of anger touched him like a flame, and for the instant he felt himself the victim of some cruel defamation. "So you despise me? Your love was only a flower of spring—to fall in the first wind; not deep, noble, loyal, as I thought it. When it came to the test you thought not of me, but of yourself—not of my salvation, but of your own detriment. So long as you were safely housed, what did it matter if the storm whirled me away?"

Lucy's eyes fell and her brows twitched. "You will have to think me selfish, I suppose," she said. "But I feel that no woman can love what is unworthy of love without spoiling her own nature. When respect ends, esteem must end, or else we profane what is the best in us." Her tone was clear, and she spoke with a sort of painful effort, as if she were aware of dealing with unaccustomed thoughts.

Dillon had cast himself upon the coarse grass. "'Love is not love,'" he said, with a

bitter accent, “‘ which alters when it alteration finds.’”

“ If it doesn’t,” she rejoined—“ if it doesn’t change when it finds a moral change in its object, then it must be founded in the very dregs of life.”

“ Ah, a moral change ! In me the change was for the better, Lucy. This thing they have told you about, it belongs to the long ago. You’re judging me on a kind of *ex post facto* ground, you see. Not what I am concerns you, but what I was. Mayn’t a man leave his error, then ? Is the hand of the Lord shortened ?”

Lucy’s face contracted. “ I told you I couldn’t discuss this,” she said, taking a step forward as if to pass him and end the matter. With her movement Dillon’s hopes failed and his confidence gave way ; dropping his head upon the grass, he said, in a stifled fashion : “ Whatever you do, Lucy, I know is right. Forgive me for—for casting this shadow into your life, dearest. You are right to hold aloof from me. I am a poor devil ! A troubled sea whose waters cast up mire and dirt ! A miserable vessel moulded with a flaw in the stuff ! Good-bye ! Leave me to my fate. And don’t remember that I was so . . . unmanly . . . as to cry like a child . . . at the last sight of you. I would like to thank you . . . if I could . . .

for all you have been to me—a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat. . . . Good-bye . . . good-bye . . . ”

Lucy stood looking back at him as he lay there upon the ground in these extremes of anguish. While he strove to make a stand against her judgments she had felt her firmness impregnable. Neither his defences nor his accusations had affected the principle which actuated her. But now that he had entirely given up the struggle, had surrendered every point and lay crushed, unpanoplied, weaponless, and wounded at her feet, an unspeakable pain and pity rushed over her.

No doubt he had been without excuse; but he had trusted and loved her; and through her heart a sudden throb, almost material in its significance, beat sharp and strong. His silence was eloquent of a helplessness which drew her as by powerful hands. His weakness was a plea. His tears persuasive rhetoric, his sobs convincing logic.

Had he not made sackcloth his garment, ashes his bed? Having wandered from the way, had he not found it again? Was he not safe thenceforth from all adventuring in dark, outer paths? She thought of his assertion of some temperamental flaw in himself. If, indeed, through an inherent weakness he was

"'I WON'T GO AWAY,' SHE SAID"



more liable than others to mistake, would she be blameless in leaving him to this slackness of will, which made him feel defenceless without her ?

Dillon's errors had not, in her first obscure perception of them, belittled him in Lucy's mind ; on the contrary, he had loomed larger for the hints of cloud and tempest which enveloped him. Now as the poverty of his character became clear to her, as he revealed himself to her in an aspect no longer aggrandized by an atmosphere of deeds which, however dubious, had yet a certain suggestion of manly force and dash and enterprise, she asked herself if womanhood might not find in upholding him a holier office than lay in any merely safe and happy wifehood.

To save ; to redeem ; the example which God himself, filled with pity for our lost condition, had set before the world, draining to this end the sacrificial cup, walking with the poor and sinful and outcast, dying on the tree. Lucy's heart rose in an almost intolerable wave of feeling. Pity and love and religious emotion mingled in her, and with them was a little flavor of personal power, a faint, uplifting, entrancing breath of something which belongs to the spirit of sacrifice.

A strong exaltation seized her. There seemed an unearthly glory in the sunset on the cliffs.

White, luminous faces shone in the clouds. Asphodels unfolded their dewless buds along the shadow-flecked upland, and the rushing wings of a swift, victorious host sounded wild and high in the freshening wind of evening. While in the east, where the afterglow reflected its length of living light, walls of jasper seemed to mass themselves about a city having no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it by day or night. Then in a breath the visionary moment lapsed, and there were in sight only the brushy uplands, the marshy pool, the grazing cattle, and, outstretched on the rough sward, Dillon's prone, despairing figure.

Lucy drew herself step by step across the little space between them, and as she spoke he uncovered his face and looked up, showing a seamed, flushed forehead, and reddened, swollen eyes. "I won't go away," she said; "I ought not to have thought of going. I see that—that I was wrong."

At this Dillon cried out, "Lucy! you are in earnest? You mean this—you—" He marvelled at the fervid brightness of her eyes. "You mean that you are not going to leave me to perish? That you are going to stay—"

"Always! always!" she interrupted, in a voice that sounded faint and tired.

XVII

ONE day, not long after, Dunbar, happening to meet Dr. Taliaferro in a straggling byway of the town, stopped, and, after a word or two upon general topics, said, abruptly, "Well, I looked up that matter you mentioned last week. It's so. Jonas gave me the details. I demanded 'em. He hated to do it. I've set the Major straight concerning our young friend. He was cut up—greatly cut up—the Major was. Said that Dillon had come and gone like a member of the family, and, indeed, had well-grounded hopes of becoming one. Yes, I'm sorry to say things had got as far as that. Dillon's probably got a very definite back-set by this time. Major Morrow's indignation is quiet but effective. What bothers me is to understand Dillon's composure in these trying circumstances. He's at his desk daily, quiet and smiling as ever. He must have a very superior kind of nerve; or, perhaps, this sharp deal he's made in walnut wood sustains him—

the calm triumph of a modest pride, you know. Rather keen of him, wasn't it, to get his fingers on that tract? Hadn't you heard? Yes, Conner's sister has considerably withdrawn to a better world, I believe. It must be all right and a square deal, or Mrs. McBeath would never have set her mark to a paper. She's honest as the day and sharp as a tack, except for her fits of melancholy. McBeath's superintending the felling, I understand. Dillon sent out a force of men and ox-teams yesterday. Of course we'll get the logs—mighty glad to get them; but I can't just make out why McBeath didn't deal with us directly. Dillon must have charmed away what little sense the poor fellow originally had."

"McBeath has bought the lot next to Mr. McVeigh's," said Taliaferro; "the restrictions on the timber have been removed very opportunely for him."

"A fool's luck," remarked Dunbar, as they parted.

Taliaferro went on his way, knitting his brows over Dunbar's remarks. It seemed to him, as it had seemed to Dunbar, a peculiar thing that Dillon should appear quite unmoved at the disastrous turn of his affairs. The doctor studied upon the matter, and came finally to the conclusion that this serenity was alto-

gether factitious, a mere mask into which Dillon's pride forced him.

Not long afterwards the time of the county fair came round, and, on the day of the opening, Streamlet, with a commendable persuasion of the duty of upholding state institutions, forsook all its usual business in order to attend the yearly festival. The fair was held at Somerset, and the morning train entirely failed to accommodate the throngs which, from an early hour, had filled the station platforms not only of Streamlet, but of numbers of little hamlets below. The coaches were filled to the last extremity of the hand-rails ; men surged over the steps with a recklessness perhaps born of long familiarity with wet boom-sticks, and as they clung they tossed consolatory jests at those who had been unable to secure even this precarious privilege.

Taliaferro had secured a foothold among the more fortunate, but as the train took the swagging curve he asked himself why he had felt even a momentary satisfaction in attaining this advantage. Certainly he felt nothing of the holiday spirit which enlivened his neighbors, and an intelligent curiosity was hardly possible to one who had assisted at so many exhibits of vegetables and patchwork and cattle. The young man, without settling upon any respon-

sible motive for his presence in the cheerful multitude, alighted with it, and elbowed his way to the 'buses and wagons drawn up behind the long depot.

An air of bustling activity hung upon the large town. Clouds of dust from the numerous vehicles directed to the outlying fair-grounds cast the climbing, stony road in a haze of yellow, which blurred the clay-banks on either side, and gave a dim, illusory effect to those who were afoot in the lower walk. Off in the distance knobs and knolls, reddening with fall, showed sometimes a relatively solid group of houses, but oftener merely the trim outlines of an isolated dwelling or so, which seemed to regard with a suspicious and watchful air the encroachments of progress on its exclusive position. The town lay in a haphazard sort of fashion among these jagged little hills. Its site was one which seemed to offer considerable resistance to human effort, but a spirit of determined enterprise had apparently arisen in proportion to the necessity for it, with the result of giving the place a distinctively Western air. The traditional languor of the South, except so far as some suggestion of it lay in a log-cabin or two, quietly going to pieces here and there among the modern structures, was only inferential. The

thronged public square and ominous-looking iron arches of the new court-house, hurrying carryalls, and rows of shops with wares spread here and there outside the doors—these, with the nomadic intimations of a photographer's tent lifting its white peak hard by the door of one of the hotels, brought up some city in the shadow of the Rockies, sprung to sudden and vigorous life from the nucleus of a mining camp.

The number of negroes in the busy streets was not without consequence in recalling the mind to Somerset's actual situation. Many of the youth of this cheerful race held positions of advantage on the top rails of the meadow fences overlooking the fair-grounds ; from the grandstand they had the look of a flock of crows chattering and fluttering upon the verge of a newly harvested field.

All the hamlets round about had given liberally to the throng within the enclosure. A mingling of farmers, lumber-men, and villagers everywhere blocked the way, segregated usually from the townfolk themselves, and distinguishable, generally, by soft hats, plum-colored coats, and striped trousers. A rainbow effect of coloring pervaded the attire of the younger women from the hilly regions outlying. Those who were in years wore black of

many tones and textures. When the stuff was wool it seemed always to adapt its folds in square creases, revealing the shape and size of the chest in which from year to year it had been frugally laid by.

Children were everywhere under foot. Crowds of half-grown boys straggled along the tiers of the grandstand, scattering pop-corn and tracking the overflow of the water barrels after them in distinct, five-toed footprints. A continual outpour of music came from the brass-band beside the race-track, an oblate half-mile expanse, smooth and dry, and spending a faint, sulphurous breath in the breeze. Here a blanketed, booted horse was exercising, and unwilling Durham cattle, deterred by the music, were being dragged about for the judges' inspection. One splendid bull, of a mahogany richness of hue, curled and creased of neck as the Assyrian sculptures of his race, butted an indignant blue-ribboned horn at the boy in charge of him, thereby occasioning alarmed little shrieks from the women who were looking on.

A man with a conspicuous lavender badge rode close to the stand guard, issuing imperative orders to some one inside. Beyond him, half-way up the rough steps, an old negro limped along at a stiff, consequential gait, ac-

counted for in the great tufts of blue and red ribbon fluttering from his ragged bosom.

Taliaferro and Dunbar had met at the gate. They stood now at the edge of the track, inspecting the multitude in the stand and commenting upon the largeness of the attendance.

"Every one seems to be here," said Dunbar, in the gratified tone of a man who has financial as well as social and patriotic reasons for his complacency. And as he spoke he scowled, and looked long and fixedly in a certain direction. "Nat," he said, "maybe I don't see as well as I used to—maybe not. But it seems to me that Miss Morrow and Dillon are sitting amicably together in the upper range of seats. After what has happened— Bosh ! I—this sunshine has made my eyes—I—eh ? How does it look to you, Nat, eh ?"

Taliaferro's light, clear glance had narrowed, and his lips set themselves rigidly. It was not likely that he should mistake any one else for Lucy. There against the strip of sky below the roof she sat, smiling in the soft, absent way he knew so well, with her light hair loose about her serene brows and a shimmer of delicate green in the broad sleeves which flared airily against the rough back of the high seat. There she sat smiling, while beside her, engrossed and unconscious of any thought of

observation, Dillon leaned forward, talking steadily.

There could be little doubt that a complete sympathy united them. No shade of doubt or displeasure or deliberation touched either face. If there had ever been any question between them its happy settlement was vouched for in their aspect, as well as in the circumstance that Mrs. Morrow herself, a complete embodiment of parental acquiescence, sat close by, fanning herself and bowing sweetly to such of her acquaintance as fared below.

“It’s plain enough that I might have spared myself the unpleasantness—for it was deuced unpleasant—of telling the Major what I did,” remarked Dunbar. “Evidently Lucy has refused to give the fellow up. He’s justified himself; juggled with her reason. I’d lay dollars to little red apples that I could tell the exact line of his argument. He’s pointed out that any suggestion of the possibility of showing a miserable hound ‘too much mercy’ is absurd, outrageous, illogical cant, and that to shrink from a close communion with villainy is a proof of mean selfishness. He’s persuaded her that his immortal welfare lay in her hands. That’s what’s done it. Women are terribly susceptible to this sort of compliment. It implies a kind of deification of their womanhood.

Where a plain, respectable lover can only ask to be loved, a scalawag can demand regeneration as well, and this presupposes his recognition of higher qualities in the lady than a decent chap needs to go hunting out. Well, sir!"—he stamped his stick irately into the ground—"she'll marry him, I reckon. I suppose it's a foregone conclusion. And after the ecstasy of the novice will come the stone cell, the bed of cinders. She can't do anything with Dillon any more than she can build stairs of sand. It isn't in the stuff. He isn't half so capable of betterment as if his offences had been downright and vigorous instead of furtive and forceless."

"But—"

"Oh, don't stick in any 'buts'! When mercy instead of simple justice was meted out to Dillon in the Jonas matter, society suffered a wrong whose consequences are practically incalculable. There wasn't an extenuating detail in the transaction."

"His uncle would have had to suffer, too. It is hard to see justice in a blow which is going to sweep down the innocent as well as the guilty."

"Very well," said Dunbar, speaking loudly, to make himself heard above the bass drum, "go on making things pleasant for the law-

breaker, then ! As I say, it's cant not to side with him. Only remember this quarter aphorism: 'When you make de jail too nice you better strenken de hog-pen !'" As the music slackened a little he continued: "As to the Major—and yet I think I can see how he too has been worked. He's a man for heroics, for magnificent charges. There wasn't a braver man in the Confederacy. I recall a splendid onslaught of his, when the dastardly Yanks—eh ? Oh, I forgot your folks fought on that side, Nat ! No offence. A good fighter I love, whatever his 'uniform. As I say, the Major's dash was great—but battles aren't won that way. 'It's dogged as does it !'—steady, calm persistence. In this matter he's probably raged round for a day and then quit. Lucy's tears, the tears and persuasions of the others—well, well. I see him yonder now. Coming this way, isn't he ? I'm sorry for the Major."

Major Morrow had indeed an air of gloom. His military erectness seemed slightly to accommodate itself to some spiritual depression, and as he advanced he stroked his gray mustache in a troubled sort of way.

Some one drew Taliaferro aside, and the Major, finding himself alone with Dunbar, said, almost at once: "I hoped to see you to-day. I felt as if I should like to explain—" He paused,

and let the matter of the explanation go. "My daughter you will probably see here in Mr. Dillon's company. You may wonder at this. I—I can easily understand your surprise. Lucy does not feel justified—she thinks it would be very reprehensible—in short, her ideas on the subject are such as—as—"

"I see," said Dunbar, finding the other pitifully embarrassed in his phrases.

"I know how ill-advised opposition in such affairs is," went on the Major, "so I temporized. I yielded, however, only a provisional consent to the—the continuance of this matter—only a provisional one. It is my hope that Lucy will be led to see how—er—mistaken her position is. Mr. Dillon—I admit that he has persuaded me of his penitence and—and all that. No doubt he is changed. But reform always suggests a weak moral texture: rents, holes, patches—a poor stuff. I may be too hard. I see my wife in the upper tier, Mr. Dunbar. I will wish you good-day."

A girl in red passed by just now—a lithe scarlet figure, with poppies above the dark brows and defiant eyes. With Alexa were Beauregard McBeath and a straight, stiff old woman whose white hair had a framing of rusty crape, and whose compressed lips and set gaze gave her a stern, judicial expression.

"Alexa looks a little discontented," said Mrs. Morrow to Dillon. "Old Mrs. McBeath—she really isn't so old as one would think—is rather a trying person to get on with, I fear."

"Beauregard himself seems care-worn and sad," said Lucy, looking towards the passing group.

"I hadn't noticed it," Dillon remarked, wincing a little. He also regarded Alexa's passage. It was hard to believe that this tall girl, moving in the throng as unconcernedly as a princess, could be the tearful, trembling creature who had once clung to him in a stammering confidence of self-reproach and love. Dillon lost himself in a momentary effort to recall if he had felt pleased or pained in the hour when Alexa babbled out her simple heart.

He glanced from her to McBeath, and bit at his mustache and drew his brows a little. And as he did so he saw that McBeath had evidently pointed him out as the purchaser of the walnut wood; for, with her falcon face turned and her cavernous eyes lifted, Mrs. McBeath stood staring up at him over the intervening heads.

XVIII

LEAF by leaf the year passed. The transitory beauty of early fall lapsed, and in the chill pure light of the late October sun everything about Streamlet had a pallid, threadbare look. Fields of stacked fodder seemed as if piled with lustreless armaments. The slopes were scattered in dead leaves and barren stalks. Under the beeches hogs nosed for mast, and the side-yard of the hotel was a waste of lean branches. There had been frost, and flocks of robins, satisfied of the end of summer, spun southward across the pale sky. Sparrows clamored shrilly in the empty trees, and birds not common to the knobs settled upon such hips and haws and other autumnal fruitage as remained. The rainy season was well on by the second week in November, and though no really heavy "tide" was likely to occur till later, business was brisk in the town, and all the usual winter activities were in full play.

Part of the walnut wood was already felled,

and the logs lay in black, regular tiers above the bank of the river. By the time of the Christmas rise all the timber would be ready to be put afloat. The arrangements were complete. Dillon had no occasion to give much thought to the matter, and his duties at the mill were indeed pressing enough to demand his entire attention.

During the month he had not been unconscious of a marked coldness in Dunbar's manner towards him. Taliaferro, too, seemed different; and Dillon had little difficulty in deciding that to one or both of these men he owed the disclosure of his offence. Since their efforts had, however, resulted only in attaching Lucy to him the more deeply, he felt that he had not suffered enough to be vindictive towards any one.

Some thought of the matter was running in his mind one morning as he stood talking with the sawyer about an order which he had just written and was tacking to a post hard by the saws. Piles of parti-colored dust lay all about, and to the right a mountain of waste ridged its pyramid of culls and wane and ends of timber. A smell of oil and wet wood and a deafening whir of machinery were everywhere manifest, and through the clangor of steam and steel the sawyer's voice came in a tone of negation.

"That's a sorry piece of wood to get any bill-stuff out of," he said, indicating the poplar log they were rolling over for the second cutting. It was pale yellow near the bark, then green and rippling in the grain, and finally of a brown, sodden hue at the heart, evidencing decay.

"You know more about it than I," began Dillon, stopping as he saw that the sawyer did not appear to be listening, but stood gazing over the lumber piles at a man who was urging a jaded horse up the hill road.

"I never saw Beau McBeath push his horse like that before," commented the sawyer. "Er—no, 'tain't McBeath. It's Bud Petty, one of the felling gang over yender. He's on Mac's horse all right. I wonder if anything's happened? See him lightin' at the doctor's office? Mebby the old lady's sick. Well, I'll put this log into planks, and get up some fresh wood for the bill. Let 'er go, Jim." And as the log rolled by him the great circular saw at his elbow daintily sliced off the wet rind.

Dillon turned back to the mill office, and with the movement he saw that the ferryman was coming up from the float, and that the ferryman's weather-beaten face wore an expression not common to it.

"Jy'all see Bud Petty lopin' up the hill?"

he inquired, shrilly, pitching his voice in a key to carry the words above the scream of the saws and the splash of the log car. "Heh? Seen him, did ye? Well, sirs, I sensed they was somethin' amiss when I see him on the fur bank a-whoopin' and hollerin' and raisin' a ruction for me to hurry over and git him. Yes, sir, I—heh? Why, no; 'tain't the old lady. It's Beau hisself. They hain't no notion he'll live. He was standin' like this, as I got it, and the tree they were notchin' stood like where the head of the chute is. The men they shouted at him for to step out of the way, and he looked round and see the tree swayin' to drop, and he 'peared to git rattled, and went first one way 'n' another, and the bole split off sudden and strek him down. Pinned him across the chist, Bud says. Old lady McBeath she's goin' on like a wild person a-flingin' her arms up and gabblin' about them trees bein' stained with blood, and sech talk. Well, there's Doc Taliaferro mountin'. I'll git back so's not to hold him."

Dillon mechanically watched his departure. Then he sat down on a log near the bank and tried to overcome the faint sense of sickness which had stolen over him. He hardly knew if what he felt was poignant regret at his own part in the mischance which had befallen Mc-

Beath, or only a simple, heartfelt sorrow that the young fellow should thus be cut down on the threshold of life, with happiness in his hand.

Then, too, he remembered that once since the felling began McBeath, troubled with some compunctions, had come to him, and in a dull, stammering fashion asked if it was not possible to drop the whole matter of the sale, and let things be as they had been.

"And how about the money you have paid for the lot next the preacher's?—how about your new house?" Dillon had asked.

At which McBeath had breathed heavily, and sought the ground with miserable eyes. "I reckon I'm pretty near a fool," he remarked.

"Oh no, you're not," Dillon assured him. "You're in the full possession of your senses. And I should like you to understand that this is also true of me."

Dillon, recalling this episode, wondered if, in pure fact, he was any more culpable than McBeath. True, there had been a certain connivance. He had no longer admitted that the first suggestion of the affair had come from his own lips. McBeath was at least equally in fault; there could be no doubt of this, though Dillon found it oddly necessary to keep on repeating to himself the assurance of McBeath's guilt.

The sun came out bright and warm as he sat there watching the yellow water unwind its sluggish coils, but the heat of it did not soothe or cheer him, and he felt neither surprise nor an added pain when somewhat later he saw Taliaferro coming back in the road across the river, and heard him, in reply to the ferryman's question, "How's the case, doc?" call back simply, "All over."

But Taliaferro, in riding past the mill, had a sense of pity and self-reproach and some amazement as he saw Dillon sitting there by himself, with tears in his unseeing eyes.

"He must have something good in him," thought Taliaferro; "actually fond of poor Beau. Perhaps Lucy has more reason for her love and loyalty than is apparent."

In an hour the tidings were spread everywhere. McBeath had been, in the village phrase, "well liked," and the news of his death was discussed with general regret.

"So young and good-hearted as he was!" said Mrs. Morrow. "He used to be in my Sunday-school class, and though he never knew the lesson he always sat very still and listened to everything with his eyes and mouth wide open. I must go at once and see Alexa. There may be something I can say to comfort the child."

Alexa, upon hearing the news, had thrown herself face downward on the hair-cloth sofa in the family-room ; and though her mother had striven with her and wept over her all day, Alexa had never spoken.

When Mrs. Morrow came and bent over her and laid a warm, soft hand on her black head, saying, "Dear child ! dear Alexa ! try to bear it bravely for the sake of those who love you," Alexa, for the first time, turned a little her sodden eyes and purplish cheeks.

"Our hearts are all torn for you !" pursued Mrs. Morrow, beginning to weep. He was so good, so kind—"

"A Mason, highly respected by all," burst in Mrs. Bohun, sobbing. "Oh, law me !"

"And so fond of you, Alexa ! You will always have his love, dear, to remember. And you must reflect that, though we have lost him, he has gone—where there—are no—no more tears or sorrows. There, Alexa ; there !" for Alexa had at last broken into passionate sobs.

"He's singin' sams of p-p-praise," wailed Mrs. Bohun. "Don't y' cry so, honey ; don't you !"

"He's happier than ever I could of made him," breathed Alexa. "But, oh, if I'd only been different to what I was ! If I'd treated him kinder !"

The day of the burial dawned clear, with a mildness in the air like that of summer, and a warm, generous blue and expanding in the November sky. A sunny yellow shone from the drifts of fallen leaf along the paths ; bushes and way-side hedges held a sepia glow, and matted sward and fields of stubble stretched a soft russet expanse below the hills.

Towards the middle of the afternoon people began to climb the rutted hill road, passing out behind the hotel to compose themselves in little groups while they rested and talked and awaited the coming of the poor funeral train. Some of them went on towards the graveyard, where, set in dry weeds and scanty firs, the path, a mere flat rift in the red clay, wandered up past a scattering of mounds to the crest of the knoll. Most of the people, however, villagers and hill folk, were still lingering in the lower road when at the turn of the station the small body of McBeath's fellow-lodgemen appeared, with their short linen aprons and various ensigns of office shining in the pleasant sun.

Behind them a heavy wagon jolted slowly over the railway tracks. For security a rope spanned the projecting end of the long pine case it carried, and following it were other farm wagons and a few country buggies.

In the seat of a small cart Mrs. McBeath sat by the side of the driver, a youth in faded jeans. She had lost her look of vigor and stiffness, and seemed to be huddled together in a lax black heap, which swayed with the motion of the wheels. As the cart advanced she stared a little wildly from the rusty crape about her withered face, muttering to herself, "O Lord, have mercy on me this day! Lord, have mercy!"

The throng of wagons and people turned in from the road at the gate afield, and, crossing the expanse of shining stubble, labored up the briery rise. The men tramped heavily through the sunburnt grasses, planting their heels in the slippery soil; the women made way less surely, detained by the brambles which caught at their skirts in passing.

Only a few saplings cast slight shadows on the crest. These and a stunted fir or so alone assuaged the barrenness of the place, with its tumbling mounds, its half-dozen black-topped picket-fences, and occasional head-pieces of rudely lettered pine. All about it the brown land rolled its rim of leafless hills. Cows, red and white, browsed in the valley, and cheery smoke from a little shed not far away spent a delicate grayness on the sky's flowery blue.

Towards the ridge of the knoll a heap of

freshly turned earth lay bright and moist. Beside it a man in a hickory shirt rested on his spade while he issued directions to some unseen worker in the hollow at his feet. Some little delay arose, and in the interval people waited silently or spoke in whispering tones. The lodgemen stood apart, grave and motionless. One of them upheld a tall staff. The breast of another glittered with a silver cross, while upon the shoulders of a man near by the vivid blueness of a satin stole shone brightly.

A little aloof from the press a village girl looked blushingly into the face of a young man who, in talking with her, set his foot in the sod of a baby's grave. A woman beyond them hushed a child against her cheek. And over the low murmurs of the crowd now and then a long wail sounded: "My boy! my sweet boy! I got to give him up! Lord have mercy! Lord bless his sweet soul this day!"

Lucy, standing with her mother and the Major at a short distance, felt her heart swelling with pity; and Dillon, as he regarded her saddening face, felt his consciousness of those mourning cries deepen painfully.

Just now the throng appeared to be drawing towards the open grave. The lodgemen surrounded it, forming a hollow line as the bearers advanced. Behind the long pine shape Mrs.

McBeath staggered, sustained by the arms of two old women, whose limp black skirts clung close about their lean limbs as they faced the wind. Mrs. McBeath's dingy crape seemed to draw all the shadows of the scene about her hollow face and staring eyes. She looked an embodiment of woe, unchastened and desperate, as, spent with years and troubles, she let herself be dragged through the brambles to the side of the open grave.

As the service proceeded her outcries grew fainter. A sort of childishness stole into her lessening voice. "He was all I had," she kept repeating. "Lord save him! He never went to wrong no one. Lord, it was me—all me! I'd ought to have told him. But it's well with him now. He freed hisself of sin. Lord, oh, Lordy! I'll never see him no more!"

Alexa, clothed in black, with her face half veiled, stood at the coffin's foot, immovable of feature and ashen of hue. Her vacant eyes sought some immeasurable distance, and as Dillon observed this dark, empty gaze, he found himself thinking that for once Alexa's tragic beauty had reached its fullest purport.

They began to lower the box, but Mrs. McBeath no longer made any lament. She stood silently watching the lodgemen cast one by one their sprigs of green into the grave, not even

uttering a sound as the clods began to fall hollow and heavy on the coffin lid.

Presently the men in the hickory shirts were flattening the sides of the new hillock and deftly rounding the head and foot. The crowd was visibly thinning. People spoke freely again as they passed down the slope. An oppression seemed to have passed from the earth with the closing of the mound.

Alexa's father had helped her into a wagon and was untangling the reins preparatory to starting. Mrs. McBeath's little cart awaited her, but she still lingered by the grave, stooping once to smooth out with her toil-worn hand some roughness in the fresh surface.

At length she lifted herself and made a step towards the cart. As she did so she stumbled, and Dillon sprang to her aid. At the sight of him Mrs. McBeath paused. There was no one near except the Morrows; but even the Morrows Mrs. McBeath seemed unaware of. She saw only Dillon's proffered hand. And seeing it she lifted her own and made a gesture as if she fiercely thrust back his assistance.

“You come to see him laid away, did you?” she said. “Your work—all your work! He’d be alive to-day if you’d never crossed his path. You needn’t to say anything. You know your own heart and what’s in it! Yes, ’n’ I know,

too! My boy lived long enough to tell me how he'd deceived me—how t' Conner heirs was livin' and all, and how you'd a took the timber notwithstanding. I got it all out of him! Even how he went and ast you to call the bargain off after the first acre was felled, and how 't you laughed in his face. Yes, I know it all."

Dillon glanced towards Lucy. She had shrunk back and was plucking at her father's sleeve, as if she besought him either to take her away or to speak in Dillon's behalf to the stern-faced woman confronting him.

The Major cleared his throat. "Mrs. McBeath," he expostulated, "this is a very serious charge. I beg you to—to—unless you have good grounds—"

"Hain't I my dyin' boy's words?" asked Mrs. McBeath. "If you ask proofs fur and beyond, look into this man's face."

Dillon struggled to recover himself. "I—if you will listen—" He began to falter, perfectly aware that any hesitation would be fatally confirmatory of guilt, yet in some strange way unable to speak out a firm denial.

"Did ever my son show you any proof of the heirs' death?"

"Proof? No, but—"

"Did he so much as tell you they was out of the way?"

"If you desire to criminate your son," began Dillon, angrily. Then it seemed to him as if dignity would be a better resource than indignation, and he added, coldly, "I will not discuss it. Another time and place—"

Mrs. McBeath silenced him with a contemptuous word. "You see for yourself, Major," she said.

The Major's face had been reddening violently as he listened and looked. "Come, Lucy," he said, "come. There's too much truth in this, evidently—too much."

Lucy's face wore a look of anguish. She leaned upon his arm, whispering, "Yes, yes; let us go."

"Seein' y'all knew my boy," said Mrs. McBeath, in a gentler way, "I want y'all to know they ain't no blemish on him, not for all the p'isinin' and pollutin' of this man. Beau hed a right to the walnut. I've known for better 'n a year that the tract was ounr. Jedge Kinney rode out our way last fall and told me how he'd ben barkin' up the wrong tree yender at Butte City, and that Joe Conner's sister died the same year as Joe, down in Virginia, where they was raised." Mrs. McBeath shuddered, as if some chilling memory had arisen in her. "And I ast Jedge Kinney to keep the news from Beau. 'He's young and lacks judgment,' I says. 'He'd

never rest till I'd signed the tract away, and I'd ruther keep it for him till he gits the money sense and he's a good wife—one as won't marry him for what he's got,' says I. And the jedge gi' me his word. Afterwards, when Beau came and told me there was nothin' to prevent our sellin' the wood, I says, 'Hev you heerd from the jedge?' And Beau nodded—he never give me the lie outright! And I thought jedge had forgot his promise, bein' old and stricken. Oh, Major, you mind how simple-hearted my boy was? Deceivin' wasn't never his disposition. And when he told me everything, lyin' there all crushed, I eased his mind and prayed God to forgive him, and he laid his head agin my bosom like a little child, and said now he could go in peace. And he did—he went smilin'!" She had her eyes on the mound as she approached the cart. "Push on," she commanded the boy; and, turning to Dillon, who stood a little away, she added, "The wood's yourn, fair and square, every stick and every stain of it. 'Twon't profit ye none. Push on, boy. Night's fallin'."

XIX

THE sun was charring the west in a ragged rim of brown as Major Morrow and Lucy walked homeward from the burying-ground. Dillon had made no show of accompanying them, but, with his hat in his hand and eyes abased, had stood silently aside while they passed.

“His sense of dramatic fitness is simply irreproachable,” thought the Major, with an unuttered oath.

Lucy said nothing to her father as they went along; but when they entered the house she flung herself suddenly on his neck and broke out, in a husky whisper, “Oh, send me away, papa! I want to be where I can’t see him. I want to forget everything.”

“You believe, then, that I was right?” asked the Major. “You understand—”

“Oh, I understand everything!” she cried. “He—he has never really changed at all. He is what he was and will remain. It was only

my folly, my miserable conceit, that made me believe I could make another man of him. I thought God had called me to undertake this high and holy office! *God!* I don't suppose He knows or cares—”

“Lucy! Lucy! don't let this harden your heart! Pity, charity, love—don't let this bitter experience seal up those springs of life. You haven't been foolish or egotistic to feel that every one who is sad or sinning has a claim upon you for sympathy. Only don't let yourself be whirled away in any delirium of sacrifice again. It's a mistake, Lucy, to think God has put evil here for the express purpose of occupying our time, or that *we* are here for the express purpose of stamping it out. We're here to grow, to be happy, to do good without martyring ourselves in the effort; to attend to our own affairs, in short, and leave His business to Him. That's how it seems to me, Lucy. I don't say this is a profound view of life, but it's a sane view, I think.”

Lucy did not seem to be following very closely her father's unusual length of speech. She was clinging to him still, and she murmured, “What is to become of him, papa? What is to become of him now?”

The Major felt his spleen rising, and he ex-

claimed, sharply enough, "Are you going to worry over that?"

Her voice was very humble as she rejoined: "Papa, I—it is only that I was wondering if it can be true that—that there are some who can't be helped much, or directed, or made better. Is it true? Can it be true?"

The Major dragged his mustache down. "God knows!" he said. "Statisticians would tell you that such people certainly exist. I—perhaps it's not a very fruitful topic of discussion. Your idea, Lucy, that a change of scene would help you to forget all these unpleasant matters is, I think, very reasonable. Shall I take you up to Woodford County? Your cousins—"

"No, oh no; I don't think I could bear having so many people around me just now. I don't want gayety, papa; I couldn't stand it. I want to be quiet and let alone. I will go and visit Janet a little while."

"But this isn't the right time of year to visit Janet," demurred the Major, thinking, however, that some wholesome influence might indeed be exerted upon Lucy by an association with the friend she mentioned—the good woman who had cared for his child when she was left motherless.

"If you prefer to stay a short while with Janet I shall not oppose you," he added.

Yet, some days later, when he and Lucy alighted from the train at a little station some miles below Streamlet and found Janet's husband awaiting them with a vociferous welcome and a large farm wagon, the Major, surveying the scene, began to doubt the wisdom of consigning Lucy to so lonely an environment. He had established his impressions of the place upon several midsummer excursions; but what had been wild and beautiful in these visits wore now a bleak and dreary air which did not reassure him.

The crests of the Cumberland Mountains rose near and far in a cold mist of light blue—no longer mere knobs, rolling their half-grown shapes over the ground in a sort of sportive cubhood, but tall, majestic piles, wearing an imperial fleece of fir-flecked white upon their shoulders.

Nor did the landscape grow more enlivening as the farm wagon rumbled on its way in the ever-rising road. Deep valleys and distant peaks diversified both sides of the ridge along which the horses toiled. Sometimes a sand-stone spring dropped icily by the way; an ox-team or so passed; occasionally a little house looked shyly from the road-side; and through

interstices of the adjacent woodland stripped tanbark oaks rose sterile and bare, and numberless pines showed their dark pyramids. Leaves drifted everywhere, a changing weft of brown and yellow and light red ; a perpetual sibilance murmured in the papery wastes ; and presently, as the wind altered, a long, mournful resonance echoed through the stark branches—the sound of the falls of the Cumberland, eight miles away, plunging with the affluence of winter tides down the crescent break in the rock-bed.

Then a small cove disclosed itself far below the ridge, lying safe and warm in the bosom of the hills. A low log-house sat in the hollow beside a spring and a wintry garden space. Smoke curled from the big chimney, and in the door a woman stood waving her apron in greeting, while a brown setter leaped about her, barking in an anguish of joyous anticipation.

“I’d never ‘a’ dared come home if anything hed happened to delay y’all,” remarked Janet’s husband, turning a mild, red-whiskered face upon his guests. “She’s ben like something crazy ever since we got word y’all was coming. Janet hain’t felt right on account of Miss Lucy not spending a week along of us this gone July like she always done heretofore.”

Janet, one of those flat-figured, plain, beaming women who seem always young through either a virginal lack of curves or an abounding joy in life, caught Lucy to her blue-cotton bosom in an ecstasy of welcome.

“But what y’all ben doing to her that she looks so white?” queried Janet after a little, as she held the girl off for critical inspection. “Major, she cert’ny ain’t over rosy! Too much parties and dancing and visiting round, I reckon—though her ma was fair-completed as ever I see. But you trust me, Major. I’ll not give Lucy back tell she’s got more color to her cheeks than she hes now.”

“Yes, papa,” smiled Lucy, glancing round the room, in which a great log fireplace expanded a ruddy glow, lighting up the beamed ceiling and four-posted bed and turkey-red hangings and array of rifles and powder-horns, “I am going to stay here till I am quite myself again.”

The brown setter sniffed at her hand, withholding recognition for a moment, and finally bounding upon her in an abandonment of suspicion so complete and fervid as to occasion his temporary banishment.

“That houn’ ain’t right full-witted yet,” signified Janet, putting on the kettle, “being unly six month old and unwaywise. His

name's Luther. Joshaway allows that he carries his tail wrong. He says a setter ain't no 'count lest his tail flags out stiff as a whip. A course we wouldn't 'a' named him Luther if we'd suspicioned he wasn't going to fill the specifications."

She was blustering about in preparations for supper. Outside, twilight was drawing the mountain-tops to infinite heights, owls hooted in neighboring forests, and through the dusk the wild, changing rhythm of the falls spent an utterance of lament. The little windows framed a vanishing world, lonely and strange in its blurring features. But the flaming log on the hearth, the lighted candles and singing kettle and shining plates gave the big room a look of friendly cheer which lightened the Major's forebodings.

When he went away early in the following afternoon he felt convinced that Lucy had been wise in coming to the cove.

"The largeness of the outlook," mused the Major, "will clear the child's mind. She was right in her instincts."

The largeness of the outlook was not, in point of fact, especially evident to Lucy's perceptions. In spite of it and of the small occupations with which she filled her days in the seclusion of the hills, bitter and sorrowful

thoughts haunted her. Sometimes, indeed, these musings lifted for a day, and a hint of life and possible content came to her as she walked through the woods about the house, or rode to the station with Janet's husband, or visited with Janet some humble neighbor across the ridge. But oftener there was a sickening remembrance upon her, from which nothing offered release.

When there was service at the church, a windowless log structure, with puncheon seats laid on cross-sticks in its expanse, she went with the others to enjoy the preaching of such mountain exhorters as chanced along.

"They ain't book-l'arned," said Janet; "but even when you don't hear a word that cheers or instructs you from the preacher's mouth, I claim it's a good thing to go and set for an hour in the house of the Lord. The world sort of loosens its grip on you, seems like, and you got more stren'th to fight it, tooth and nail, when it jumps on to you agin."

"And the air sharpens a body's appetite for Sunday dinner," added Janet's husband, thoughtfully. "Religion is a mighty good thing any way you take it."

Once, in a day when the winds were still and a breath of summer retook the chilled earth, they rode to the Cumberland itself, and, de-

scending a gorge, viewed the broad sea of water which widens in a lake-like stretch above the falls. At this point the noise of the cataract was a deafening roar. Dashing in a fall of sixty feet, the current blinded the air as with the smoke of a field of battle. Logs blackened the stream, showing the terrific speed of the current as they dashed over the break. Now and then a piece of timber nosing the shore showed the familiar brand of the mill at Streamlet impressed in the wood long before, when the mountain runnels were only trickling threads.

Beyond the river the roof of an old hotel, used as a place of entertainment for summer visitors, extended its long roofs and spray-wet walls. It was closed and desolate-looking in the hold of the winter cliffs and with the tumbling river at its doors, but as Lucy looked along the porches where, in a by-gone August, she had walked and idled with her Woodford County kinsfolk, a sudden remembrance of summer green and rich vines and serene waters came upon her.

Life had seemed then so soft, so pliant in its substance, waiting to be pressed with light and happy fingers into any beautiful and permanent shape that one might choose! Now it appeared to her a stuff of stern fibre, not easily moulded

by any one according to his desire, but settling of itself into scarcely alterable figures, warped or straight according as it would.

"There's a rock yender where you can stand and see three States," remarked Janet's husband.

"Yes, I've stood on it," said Lucy, fastened still to those older memories. "It seems very long ago."

In the middle of December a letter from Dillon came. He had easily found out her whereabouts, and had written, he said, because he could not help it. He made no mention of Mrs. McBeath's denunciations. He said nothing now of his unworthiness or grief or penitence; he spoke only of his love. His diction had its usual smack of allusion. Phrases of the patriarchs mingled with felicitous turns caught from modern singers, and gave the written sheets a certain atmosphere of familiar charm. But, despite his verbal aptitude, the matter of the letter was vapid and pointless. He loved Lucy still. He hoped still for sympathy and comprehension, and he knew too well her loveliness of character to feel that she would any longer withhold the assuring word he asked.

The very sight of his hand, graceful, easy, half feminine, moved Lucy deeply. Even be-

fore she tore away the envelope she had a dizzy feeling. The walls of her little room seemed to be whirling away, and her fingers were weak and unsteady. She read the closely written pages in a sort of passion of haste, impelled by an incomprehensible mixture of interest and contempt ; and when she had finished she let the letter fall, and shrank back in her chair, trembling.

A dimly defined peril appeared to be lurking near her. She feared to see its face, and yet something in her pressed her to look calmly upon it and accept it. All the little belongings of her daily life began to give her a sense of distaste ; she seemed to be sensible of a loathing for everything which held her to a stern remembrance of what her ideals had been, and of the kind of woman she had tried and hoped to be. In a kind of scared haste she put on her wraps, and went out to see if air and movement might not restore her.

It was clear and cold in the low places about the house, and clearer and colder still as she mounted the southern rise, and, with Luther darting before her at jack-rabbits and squirrels, came into the higher levels. The sky was purple with snow that had already begun to fall lightly as Lucy passed under the tanbark oaks. She walked at a smart gait, seeing little before

her, struggling only in a frightened way to shake off the impulses that were with her.

But neither the swift movement nor the sharp air served to scatter the vision she strove to avoid ; on all sides Dillon's face appealed to her, not for forgiveness now, or help or compassion or comfort, but simply by the magic of its gentleness, its confiding lips, its seeking eyes, its passion of youth and love. Lucy could see his dark pupils widen in a fixed, long gaze ; his nervous hands touched her hair, and his voice, with its flexible, sweet undertone, rang constantly in her ears.

“ Oh,” she cried out, turning her face to the skies, “ I beg you to help me ! Lord, I am greatly in need ! ”

Then upon her hot, closed eyes there came a sight of women with flushed faces, of men laughing and reckless, gathered in some wild carnival of gayety ; of glasses shattered in an uproarious toast ; of songs and shouts and license ; of hateful music and a riot of reeling forms. Her ignorant fancy took in this scene with a faltering, vague sense. The insight was clearer when there came to her some idea of an office with the aspect common to business places, and occupied with grave men who listened while one among them lifted his old voice in a plea for mercy upon the abased, dis-

honored figure crouched beside him. It was vivid enough, this imagining; but not so vivid as the bare burial knoll which swept it by—the bare burial knoll of Streamlet, with the up-land wind stirring the rough grass around a new yellow mound, and carrying the accents of a bitter voice away beyond the rude crosses.

Lucy turned back. There was a rigidity in her face as of resolution enforced by a difficult effort. The following evening Dillon found in his post-office box a letter of one line. It was from Lucy, and it asked him not to write to her again.

XX

IN Streamlet it was winter and desolate. The hills were bald and bare. The sphinx knob, denuded of foliage, revealed ledge upon ledge of grinning rock ; it looked as if showing its teeth fiercely, as if snarling a menace upon the little town crouching below, pitifully small now in the emptiness of the valley, where fall had nibbled close the last stalk, the last leaf. The house of the general, with its huge chimney and heavy walls, alone seemed able to withstand the weather. The other dwellings of the bottoms appeared shrunken and insufficient. Even the hotel wore a stark, chill air, as if the rigors of frost were in its timbers.

Snow came at frequent intervals, banking the higher roads in dry white, and melting along the lower places of the town in illimitable red mud. The rivers were become great rushing currents, yellow and dense as viscid oil, and floating an enormous drift of logs and staves and tangling bark.

The walnut wood had not been put in reach of the December tides, for the incoming timber of the mill had proved unusually large, and the full capacity of the boom was required in handling it. To risk a crush had not been thought advisable, and the McBeath timber was therefore reserved for later water.

Towards the beginning of February Dillon had finally arranged for its delivery, but an expected rise, upon which he depended to bring down the logs, fell short, occasioning a delay which gave him some concern.

"Oh, it's all right," said the sawyer, "so long as she don't spring a freshet on you. Though, to tell the truth, I don't like it when she holds up this time of year and just simmers along. Things are beginning to melt up yender in the South Fork kentry. Well, you'll have to put your trust where you jedge it 'll do most good. Mountain streams is as treacherous as the female sext."

Dillon uttered a note of irritation. "What's all this talk? Isn't the boom solid?"

The sawyer assumed a noncommittal expression as he said: "You kin blow a mountain holler if you got powder enough. A boom's a boom; 'tain't the wall of Chiny ner the Bank of England."

Dillon turned on his heel. The months had

not dealt kindly with him. He had grown heavier, indeed, but the uneven color threading his face in little broken lines hardly contributed to a suggestion of entire well-being. A look of continual annoyance marked his face, and in matters so small as the suggestion of careless smoking in the burned ends of his mustache a certain listlessness or recklessness was defined in his appearance.

Lucy's letter, which he had received some weeks before, had surprised and angered him. He had feared that she might not write, indeed ; but if she wrote at all he had thought it would be in a sorrowful vein, making some tender feint of renouncing him, giving him a tacit hope, or, if not hope, at least such consolation as might lie in the demonstration of her grief. The sharp, hard line of the real letter struck him sorely. He had believed his hold upon Lucy deeper, stronger ; and at sight of the simple words, which told him nothing of the actual weakness underlying their apparent force and firmness, he was sensible of a chagrin involving almost his last shred of self-confidence.

Then, too, the McBeath affair had become generally known throughout the town, and everywhere Dillon began to encounter looks of coldness and contempt. These he was able to

endure; but when the common idlers of the place began to treat him with the rough familiarity which, in lieu of reprobation, coarse minds usually display towards a man who has relinquished all right to their respect, Dillon grew keenly aware of the levelling power of his conduct.

His position at the mill would not be tenable much longer. He realized this in Dunbar's manner, and he determined upon leaving Streamlet immediately upon the conclusion of his timber transaction.

Any delay in this business was consequently very trying to him, and he welcomed with enthusiasm the news which one day came of heavy rains at New River. The South Fork, lifting convexly in its banks, began to run high and fast, and at dusk of the day of the tidings, as Dillon talked with a shoe drummer in the hotel office, a logger came to tell him that the walnut was pressing into the boom.

Several men sat smoking in the moderate glow of an oil-lamp on the office table. The tall, whitewashed stove roared cheerfully, and managed to render less dreary the swishing of rain on the great windows and the monotonous drip of water from the laths in the broken ceiling. Under this patch of fallen plaster a black pool was forming and oozing slowly off between

the boards of the floor. Mud had dried in a crust on the foot-rail of the stove, but slipping tracks of it about the door seemed like an invasion of the clay-cowled paths outside.

Now and then the door opened to admit a drenched man and a flow of wind. A stock of heavy boots and shoes invested two long tables under the pillars to the right, and a smell of fresh leather blended with the prevailing odors of tobacco.

Dillon dismissed the messenger and returned with renewed spirits to the conversation. He was finishing the narration of some story in which the shoe drummer exhibited a flattering interest when the logger came back, leaving the mud about the door honeycombed from his spiked soles.

“I bought a stack of the whites,” Dillon continued, half turning. “Things were looking pretty desperate about that time, and, whether it was the color or not, the luck turned; everything began to come my way, and— Well, what is it now?”

A nervous pallor struck him as he listened. The river was growing terribly full, and the logs were plunging down altogether too fast. More men were needed to help to store the timber in the boom. Cables were necessary, urgent measures imperative.

"Davis says he's going to set all hands to rafting," said the man, wringing out his hat. "He needs more rope and staples than he's got, and he says you better git 'em there as quick as the Lord 'll let ye; the boom's chuck-full. If she ain't eased she's liable to let the stuff through."

Dillon, cold with foreboding, made his way into the stormy darkness. The big bare beeches were whipping in the wind, the signal-light smeared the wet ties with oily orange. About the station it was dark and still, and farther away everything was hooded in impenetrable night. Not a hint of the town broke through the lessening rain till, at the brow of the hill road, the bowl-like dip of its site suddenly became apparent. It was prayer-meeting night, and the church's narrow windows shed slits of red upon the darkness. A sound of singing, baffled and frustrated by the wind, came and went. Other lights shone round about. They shook in the wet like so many lanterns set in the prow of boats moored in a hill-locked harbor.

Down in the slushy bottoms the clamor of the rivers took Dillon's sense, intermingled with the hoarse cries of the loggers, the heavy thud of driving staples, and the sibilant cackling of the fire in the iron baskets along the bank. Then

the swollen currents came in sight, splashed across with fiery vermillion and ribbed with timber and scaled with silvery staves that shone on the surface like some light leprous affection of the water. Along the river's edge the boom-logs dipped and wavered, grating their links of chain, while hurrying shapes moved back and forth, casting long, weird shadows up the slopes. Great heaps of drift, loosened from the boom, thatched the central waters in heaving black, and above, on the floating head of the works, men were plying long pike-poles, grappling the timber still, though manifestly unable any longer to store it safely.

Every moment, despite attempts at reaching it, wood was eluding the workers. Already a noticeable quantity had passed through the chained confines of the boom and out into the stream. Dillon could see it wheeling by. He stood on the bank palsied, watching the escaping timber and listening to the excited shouts of the workmen, the scream of the wind, and the steady clash of the current. These noises seemed to fill the night with an unintelligible uproar of fear and danger, yet, suddenly enough, through it all a single sharp cry of warning rang in clear syllables, "She's going! the stuff is passing out!"

There was a hollow, rushing sound, a tre-

mendous heave in the cramped timber. Then the river, floored solid with swift logs, swept steadily by, and Dillon knew that the whole of the walnut wood was on its way to the open sea.

Men gathered about him ; he heard a confusion of voices and felt a flask at his lips. The liquor revived him somewhat, and, drenched with the splash of the current, dazed, stricken, he began to stumble up the bank and through the plastic lower roads to the hill.

All the village lights were out now, for it was away past midnight, and only the lantern which some one had thrust into his hand enabled him to find his way. In the blinding blur of its rays strange, motionless black things showed their small, thick shapes along in the road, cuddling close to the stones, lurking everywhere in a still, sinister fashion. Dillon had got himself half-way up the hill before he recognized them as nothing more actual than intensified shadows of the stones at his feet, cast into vivid relief by the nearness of the light.

Across the hotel porch a faint glow fell from the office windows. It seemed like the radiance of the fire shed from the stove's open door. Some one appeared to be raking out the ashes, renewing the coals, for Dillon caught



"SHE'S GOING ! THE STUFF IS PASSING OUT ! "



the sound of the poker and the hissing of disturbed embers even before he set his uncertain foot on the steps or laid his wet shoulder against the heavy panels of the door.

The wind chopped suddenly upon him and thrust him across the threshold. He caught at the door and clapped it to, and stayed himself for a moment, breathless and bewildered, with slivers of glass from a shattered side of the lantern falling about him on the office floor. It seemed to him that some one gave a little cry, and presently his stunned, stupid eyes saw on her knees before the fire a woman in a loose black gown, with a loose black braid of hair hanging to the floor behind her. She did not speak or rise. The firelight sharpened her features, burnishing the long throat, deepening the hollows of the startled eyes, refining the heaviness of the parted lips.

Dillon stared dully at Alexa. She had not spoken to him at all for weeks and weeks, nor noticed him in any way ; but as he stood gazing towards her he had an intimation that she had heard of his loss, had known he would come in late, half-drowned, half-crazed, and had stolen from her bed to keep the fire up, so that he might at least be warmed.

The perception gave him neither pleasure nor surprise, nor indeed any sensation. He

felt nothing but a growing dimness of vision. The excitement through which he had passed, the exposure, the buffeting of the wind, the drenching rain, and the raw whiskey he had drunk began to tell upon him in the heat of the office. Life seemed to be wheeling away ; an overpowering dread caught at his heart and held his breath, and below his feet the firm earth appeared to melt.

In another instant there was a firm grasp upon his arm ; some force sustained him, and drew him forward and into one of the knife-nicked office-chairs beside the fire. In his ear Alexa's voice sounded in some stifled, inexplicable confusion of broken sentences, interlarded with murmurs of pity or alarm or pleading, and with one recurrent word, which finally took hold upon his recovering sense.

Seeing that Dillon had come to himself and was quietly regarding her, Alexa grew at once silent and shrank away.

“Forgiveness, Alexa ?” he said, relieved of the deadly weakness which had been with him. “What are you talking about ? Is it possible that I heard you asking me to forgive you ? For what ?”

Alexa hung back in the shadows beyond the shaft of light. Her face was frightened and moved, and she kept her hands against her

bosom, as if the beating of the heart was too fast.

"I've brought all this on you," she whispered; "everything that's gone wrong—the flood—*her*—everything is my fault. I *prayed* that you mightn't be successful or happy." Her tones died faintly, and Dillon roused himself from a contemplation of this statement and began to laugh.

"You *prayed*, did you?—you poor child!—and God gave you the same thoughtful consideration which he accorded the patriarchs when they asked that their enemies be confounded. Do you still write letters to Santa Claus, Alexa?"

A sob echoed from the shadowed obscurity where Alexa hid herself, and, catching it, Dillon changed his tone, and, speaking gravely, asked, "But why should you call down the wrath of Heaven on me, Alexa? What have you against me? What have I done?"

There was a silence. Then a low voice stole falteringly from the farther darkness: "I wanted you to suffer like you'd made *me*."

Dillon leaned from his chair with a little imperative gesture, saying, quietly, "Come here." There was no response to this, and he repeated, "Come, Alexa."

A movement disturbed the shadow then, and

Alexa, as if forced by some power with which pride had vainly struggled, stole slowly into sight. He reached out and hastened her advance by drawing her towards him with a gentle hand. "You loved me, after all, didn't you?" he said, smiling a little. "I knew it well enough."

Alexa looked at him, and fell to weeping sorely. "Of course you know I did," she sobbed. "I don't care *who* hears me. I did. And when I found you didn't care a thing in the world for me—not so much as the wrappings of your finger—I—my heart broke; yes, it broke. And I promised to marry *him*—that poor fellow that's gone—because I had enough pride left—*then*—to want to show you I hadn't been any more in earnest than you. Oh, it's good he's passed where his troubles are done, for I don't think I could of married him when it came to the last! I used to feel sometimes as if I'd die unless I told him right out that, mean as you'd treated me, I loved you still."

Dillon held her a little away, and regarded her and drew her back again as he said, "What a poor, spiritless thing you are, Alexa, to care like this for a miserable beggar who hasn't anything in the world except a lot of debts he can't pay and a disgraced name—a fellow who has never been, and probably never will

be, true to anything or any one, and who has been twice jilted by the girl he preferred to you ! Suppose some one had come and told *you*, Alexa, that I was guilty of some contemptible crime or other, or a number of contemptible crimes, would *you* have thrown me down ?"

"I couldn't of," wept Alexa.

"*She* was afraid her own flawless whiteness of soul might get corrupted or spoiled, or something, if she stood by me. She had a pious notion that a good woman can't continue to love a bad man without suffering contamination. Maybe you can understand this, Alexa, being a woman. Being a man, and therefore only an elemental creature, it seems to me that if the love amounted to anything it wouldn't be able to reason around all these fine points. What do you think, Alexa ?—eh ? Aren't you afraid the angels are shedding mournful tears because I have got my corrupt arm around you ?"

Alexa's reply was not of a direct nature ; but it denoted many things, among which was a certain comprehension of the meaning of Lucy's position, and a sense of her own personal unwillingness to forego, in the interests of a dimly defined and altogether colorless higher life, anything worth having in the lower ranges of existence.

"I've got only one life to live," said Alexa.

"Alexa ! Alexa ! you aren't afraid that heaven is slipping away ?"

"It seems nearer than common," said Alexa.

He did not laugh. He dropped his head on his breast and rested his cold cheek upon her hand, and bitterly contrasted this unquestioning love with Lucy's scruples and doubts and decisions. The human comfort which stole upon him from Alexa's presence and Alexa's simply defined adoration warmed and consoled him ; yet he was perfectly sensible of a strong distaste for the common perfume in which Alexa was accustomed to drench her coarse, long hair.

"Help me up," he said ; "help me as far as the hall door, Alexa. I am mud from head to foot and unutterably weak. I shouldn't ask it, perhaps, but you won't mind lending me a hand, will you, or wince or flinch if your sleeve gets soiled ?"

XXI

IT was a raw day in late February, with a thin blanketing of snow throughout the cove, and a heavy whiteness resting stole-like on the massive shoulders of the mountains all around. Winds were snarling in the slender tanbark oaks and squatting firs. The rumble of slow and heavy wheels sounded in the frozen road branching downward from the ridge, and at the rumor of hoofs a great barking arose in the porch of the log house.

The door opened, and Janet appeared in the threshold, speeding an inquisitive glance towards the approaching wagon. "Any mail?" she called to her husband, whose scarf-encircled head inclined comfortably over the reins.

"Expectin' any?" he inquired, fetching up. "Seem like you're mo' curious after mail these days 'n ever I knowed you."

"D' law, man!" said Janet. "You sense right well that I ain't looking for no word. It's Miss Lucy as is always speckelatin' about

the post and seeing letters in the candles. Makes me right sick when there's nothing for her, she 'pears so disappointed. Huh ! Oh, you got something, have you ? Why 'n earth didn't you say so ? I'll take it right in to her. She's ben mighty downcast this last week."

She reached up for the packet which her husband unearthed from some interior depth, and as she inspected it she said : "It's from Mis' Morrow !" A pleased smile increased the beaming breadth of her placid face, and she hurried across the big living-room and stopped at the door of Lucy's chamber and rapped, and, without waiting for any response, pushed into the apartment.

Lucy was sitting by the window with a book in her lap. Her elbows were fixed upon the crumpled pages and her face was buried in her hands. At Janet's entrance she recovered herself from what had appeared to be a bitter sort of reverie, and lifted a startled brow and regarded the woman with paling eyes.

"I went to work and scared you, didn't I, honey ?" said Janet. "I hardly took sense of what I was doing, being so eager. I got a letter for you."

The book slipped from Lucy's knees in her sudden movement. She stretched a shaking hand, breathing, "A letter ? ah—"

“From your ma,” announced Janet, delivering the heavy enclosure, and marvelling that Lucy’s head should sink back in so sudden an aspect of weariness. “She’s a faithful writer, your ma is—has a mighty trick with the pen. Me, I could no more cover the sheets she sends you every week o’ the world than I could fly! After I’d put down, ‘Favor received and contents noted,’ I’d be at the end of my string. Well, honey, I’ll leave you to cipher it out in peace. Come, Luther!”

“When are you coming home to us, dearest Lucy?” wrote Mrs. Morrow. “Always you say ‘soon,’ but the days pass and you do not come. But for your papa’s rheumatism, which has greatly worried him of late, I should have come to fetch you away in spite of yourself. Now, however, the weather will soon be mild again and he will improve. Streamlet, too, will put on its spring-time garb; wild flowers will bloom along the hills, and everything will make your return a bright and happy one. Oh, dear Lucy, how I miss you! We always went everywhere together, and talked over things, and had our fancy work of evenings, and I am quite lost without you! I tried to finish the lunch-cloth you began, but I could not. My tears wet the silks through and through. Some of them ran—especially the lilacs. They could

not have been fast colors. Yesterday the preacher's niece called ; she asked particularly for you. Among other things she was telling me that the engineer is very angry because his wife has taken Lete Haight to help with the housework. It is not only Lete's character that he objects to, but the fact that she cannot cook or do anything properly, and had to be begged to come and has to be coaxed to stay. He is at present taking his meals at the hotel, where, he says, he can at least get something to eat, and shall continue to do so till his wife sends Lete away. This his wife refuses to do. She says that she cannot allow mere voices of nature to call her from life's nobler missions. To rescue the perishing, she tells the engineer, is a higher duty than to see to it that a husband's coffee is exactly to his taste. And, indeed, Lucy, it seems as if she were right, though I fear it is going to take some time to regenerate poor Lete. I see her wheeling the engineer's baby on the bluff as I pen these lines. She has got a great many red feathers in her hat, and is nodding and smiling in her silly way at some workmen who are mending the switch on the tracks below. The baby is crying very loudly indeed. But, of course, the engineer's wife cannot reprimand her, for she would leave at once. This is a baffling world,

dearest Lucy. Not much has happened in your absence. The sawyer's daughter and Bud Petty were married last week, and Halifax Burns is down with another attack. I thought Dr. Taliaferro spoke rather harshly of the poor old man when I inquired. He was always just a little hard, the doctor, and never seemed to try to exercise towards human weaknesses that large, tolerant spirit which is incumbent on all of us. He tells me that he is going abroad in May. We shall miss him. The poor will also miss him, for though, as I say, he is not as gentle as he might be with poor creatures who get hurt in fights or who have delirium tremens and such things as a result of that human frailty which we, who are strong, ought to bear with so considerately, still he never sends in bills to those who cannot afford to pay, and I have known him do numbers of kindly little things for people. Now, dear Lucy, there is a subject which I have thought best to avoid in my letters to you. But it seems now as if I had better introduce it, once for all. Mr. Dillon is also going away, and you need not delay your return through any fear of meeting him. His going will not be deeply regretted, for he has lost people's confidence very completely. His misfortunes, lately, have been marked. A freshet swept off all the walnut

timber—that dreadful timber which has, indeed, seemed to have a curse upon it. This may sound superstitious, Lucy, but I let it stand. They saved almost nothing. I understand that Mr. Burkely made good the remaining payment. He was down here for a day or so, but did not seem on very cordial terms with his nephew. Oh, Lucy, you did well to give him up! His conduct this winter has been—but I cannot talk of it! He looks so different, so dissipated. The mill people have dismissed him. He wasn't attending to his work at all. From what I hear he is going to take charge of a little saw-mill in a scrap of river hamlet below Rowena—a settlement at which the *Daniel Boone* stops on its way to Nashville. I heard Mr. Dunbar tell your father that it was a very rough place. He said that last year they had a blind tiger there, and that the man who kept it shot a revenue officer dead. I should think the villagers would have naturally objected to any one's keeping a tiger among them, though, of course, its being blind would make a difference. Still, where there are children one cannot be too careful. It might have got loose any time. Yes, Lucy, Mr. Dillon leaves on Wednesday on the *Daniel Boone's* regular trip. There are some other things I feel impelled to write you about him, but refrain, since I am not

positive in my information, though I had it pretty straight. Suffice it to say that this matter only points the more deeply his weakness of character, his lack of vigor in any direction—”

The letter fluttered out of Lucy's hand. Dillon was leaving Streamlet, more than ever in disgrace with fortune and in men's eyes. Despised and forsaken, he was turning his face to a wilderness which Lucy tried vainly to picture as she stared out upon the mountains and saw nothing anywhere for all her seeking except only Dillon's face.

In spite of everything, that image had not become revolting to her. There were power and pathos in its hold upon her fancy. She knew that to think of him as she thought of him involved her in a loss of all spiritual dignity, yet day by day the thought of him grew stronger and her own strength less. And as she read the letter which assured her still more fully of his worthlessness and completer demoralization, she realized very clearly at last that the matter had no longer for her any moral aspect whatever.

Dillon's delinquencies were a part of him, an actual part of that personality to which her affections simply and doggedly clung. She was not duped now by any such vista of change in

him as had widened upon her dazzled eyes in the upland pasture, when he lay weeping on the ground and a transport of devotion lifted her soul to a sense of the sweetness of upholding and saving him. She knew that it was not now a question of saving him. She could not lift him, but she could sink to the levels where his walk must be, and share with him the life which he had chosen, or which he had at least not chosen to avoid.

No vision of angels now, no flinging of palms or echo of victorious hosannas, no soaring heavenward, no joy of expiation. Nothing but a hand upon her heart which drew her down. That was all.

Lucy rose suddenly and paced about the room, pushing back her hot, heavy hair. It was Tuesday. To-morrow—even so soon as to-morrow—he would be leaving Streamlet! There was scarcely time to reach him—scarcely time. She flung the door open in a breathless haste, and cried out, “Oh, Janet! come and help me get ready. My trunk, you know! It must be packed. I’m going home early in the morning. Oh, if there were a train to-night!”

Janet got up, setting an aghast look on Lucy’s crimson cheeks and bright wide eyes and tumbling hair. She knew enough of Lucy’s

story to fear some news of Dillon had brought about this sudden resolution.

"Honey," she faltered, "you 'ain't changed your mind respectin' *him*, have you?" She caught some confirmation in Lucy's face, and threw her apron over her head and wailed, "Don't you!—don't you, Lucy!—don't you go back to that no 'count, triflin' scamp! If you do you'll repent it till the—"

"Oh," cried Lucy, laughing lightly, "he isn't much worse than other people! Or if he is, I don't care anything about it."

"Lucy!"

"No, I don't care."

Taliaferro chanced to be in the station at Streamlet upon the following morning when the North-bound train dashed from the cut below the hotel. He had been writing a message on a yellow pad of telegraph forms, and the pen was still in his hand as he glanced from the barred window and saw Lucy stepping from the foremost car. He stood motionless with his eyes upon her, dazed a little at the unexpectedness of the sight.

Lucy did not see him, though she was looking about her in a searching, restless sort of way, as if the thronged platform and heaped freight cart and distant hills and red church

spire and cold gray sky—all appealed to her, yet could not arrest her attention. There was a good deal of noise about the station: boys were shouting in the school-house yard; cocks crew lustily; the engine issued a whir of steam; and the *Daniel Boone*, away down at the landing, in a clear, continuous blast, announced the hour of its departure. Yet for all the affluence of sound Taliaferro seemed to himself to be aware only of Lucy's voice, ringing softly in a greeting here and there to some one of the throng about the tracks.

She wore a long twist of gray fur around her throat. Her face was radiant with unusual color, her brownish eyes suffused with an eager light. As she spoke many little smiles played upon her lips. Taliaferro had never seen her in so marked a mood of joyousness, and some strange fervor of hope seized him as he witnessed it. She had forgotten, then, all the misery of her sad and mistaken troth. She had outlived the thought of Dillon. She had come home lovelier than ever, happy, restored. Surely her heart's depths had not been grievously touched when she could so soon look like this! She seemed even, so he thought, a little excited, a little wild in the pleasure of being home again. He felt that he must go out to her and tell her in some moderate and composed way

—if he could manage this—how her return rejoiced them all. She must not miss a single hand-grasp, a solitary face.

Lucy herself, standing on the station steps, was sensible that she was talking rapidly to the sawyer and a villager or so hard by. She could see that they were rather surprised at her interest in the health and welfare of their families. Meanwhile she waited for the train to go and leave the hill road clear, so that she could see if Dillon had already started down. Perhaps he was not yet gone? She glanced towards the hotel, at the gate of which a sturdy pair of horses harnessed to a buggy was whinnying and champing. And as she did so the wide office door burst open in a sudden and startling kind of fashion, and a gay, noisy group precipitated itself upon the porch.

A very demonstrative leave-taking seemed to be in progress up under the wintry vines and delicate shadows of the beeches. Some one was crying, too, though the laughter continued, while a choked, burly sort of voice called, loudly, "Here, now, maw, you want to quit this! Brace up, can't you! Don't you make her break down right at the last, with the *Daniel Boone* blowin' to start! They'll miss the boat if you carry on like that!"

Lucy turned to the sawyer, asking, "Why, what is all this?"

The sawyer gave an amused gurgle as he inquired, "You mind Alexy Bohun, don't you? She got married this morning. Yes'm, Alexy's married! Lord, I've known her since she was a baby!"

"Married!" cried Lucy, smiling. "How strange that I never heard a word of it."

"They hain't made much of a splurge," put in the blacksmith. "'Y' see, McBeath's only been dead like about four month. M' wife, she thinks it's scan'lous. But I says like this: 'Beau won't be not a mite deader twenty years hence 'n he is right now.' That's what I told her. They say the Bohuns didn't favor the match none; but Alexy, she's a hull team, she is, with a little dog under the wagon. She had her way, Alexy did!"

"And whom has she married?" asked Lucy, arresting herself to exclaim, "Oh, here she is!" as, surrounded with chattering girls, Alexa appeared at the head of the hotel steps.

Alexa it was, certainly, smiling through her tears, and blushing and dimpling and bridling under the lofty plumes and lavish bows and buckles of her overtrimmed hat. She carried a bunch of roses, and as she advanced she tossed

the loose red flowers into the hands of the laughing horde about her, while a few of the falling petals, blowing outward, flecked as with drops of blood the path before her. Behind her—but who was this behind her, taking her hand to lead her gayly down the steps? Who was the young man waving with so familiar a gesture this half-sportive, half-contemptuous farewell to the throng on the porch? Lucy, staring over the whinnying horses, noted Dillon's careless, lifted face and slender, moving hand. He looked stouter than she remembered him, with a thickness of the eyelids and a broken color in the full cheeks. He was changed indeed, but it was Dillon. It was he who, a little uncertainly, wheeled about to snatch from one of the chattering girls the bride's rose she had thrust in her hair.

There was a movement about the buggy, a cry of farewell; the horses dashed over the tracks, and the light clangor of handfuls of rice tinkled on the buggy-top. Then the brow of the hill suddenly blotted out the vehicle, the hotel gate banged, the girls flew up the path, the office door slammed to.

Lucy was still standing on the platform step. She had become very white, and Taliaferro as he approached her began to understand from

her change of countenance that Dillon's marriage had taken her unawares. He hardly dared encroach upon the fixed vacancy of contemplation which held her; but people were beginning curiously to observe how strange and still she looked, with strands of fair hair blowing across her empty eyes, and all the color lapsing even from her lips.

"Is it really you?" asked Taliaferro, therefore, as he came towards her. "You know how welcome you are!"

Lucy appeared to take him in without immediate recognition. There was a little pause, which the young man found embarrassing. Then she started and gave a quick, gasping breath and a suppressed note of exclamation with the air of one who wakens suddenly from a bad dream and is relieved and reassured to see a kind, familiar face close by.

She drew a hand from her muff and held it forth; and as Taliaferro clasped it he took the little travelling-bag from her arm and asked, "May I carry this burdensome affair up hill for you?"

"Will you?" said Lucy. "I dreaded the lonely walk."

And together they crossed the rutty road and went up the rise, and presently disappeared under the lacing branches of the high-

land trees, beyond which, in the early grayness of the overcast sky, a slender rift of warm blue, almost unseen as yet, was beginning to break, in promise of sunshine and spring.

THE END

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